

COMIC SECTION *in this Issue*

SUPER- DETECTIVE



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The
**BAMBOO
DEATH**
by Clint Murdock

**130
Pages!**
**A Super
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**FOLLOW
THAT GIRL!**

by Terry O. K. Burlington

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How to Be a Success in RADIO-TELEVISION

SUPER- DETECTIVE



Vol. 11

MAY, 1950

No. 2

Outstanding Novel, Complete In This Issue

FOLLOW THAT GIRL! 8

By TERRY O. K. BURLESON

She was a lovely chick, and somehow tied up with the gang I was after. I hoped she wasn't in too deep, and it took a hail of gunfire to give me the answer.

Complete Novelettes and Short Stories

- THE BAMBOO DEATH.....By Clint Murdock 24
Strange things can happen in the Far East, and this American got his share.
- FLIRTING WITH THE CHAIR.....By Edward William Murphy 40
Here I was, speeding through the night with \$3,000 and a gory corpse!
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Detective Sergeant Mason once loved the girl whose murder confronts him.
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Sixteen Pages of Sensational Detective Comics

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- RAY HALE "A Noose for NEWS".....By Ken Battefield 56
The death of the old woman seemed very peculiar until Hale got busy.

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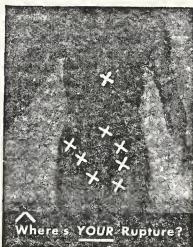
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ON THE BLOTTER . . .

By SAM D.
COHEN

VERY seldom has your editor the desire to stand on his hind legs and give out with a loud yell but a communiqué from a reader has given me the desire to do just that thing. Most of the mail received in this department lauds our police departments, by the stating of incidents in which members have gone above, beyond and what have you, the call of duty, many times paying for this "privilege" with their greatest possession—their lives. But Arnold Hansicker, of Chicago, Illinois, sends me a clipping in which a police officer stands accused of accepting a five dollar bribe in lieu to giving a traffic ticket. Arnold states, in part:

"Here is proof positive that your cop is out for all he can get. No matter what he does he has his hand out and woe to the man who refuses him. Though you have always extolled the police officer to the sky, I know him for what he is. . . ."

Arnold continues, but the rest of this message is a vituperation of police officers in general. In my more than twenty years as newspaper reporter covering crime news I have heard this argument again and again. But it seemed that everyone condemning the honesty of our cops had a police record a yard long. Arnold, here, sends me a clipping of one officer who stands accused of accepting a five-dollar bribe. Please remember, he stands accused—he hasn't as far as I know, as yet been found guilty. We mustn't preclude the possibility of a frame-up—it's been done before—by someone with an axe to grind against this particular officer, but let us suppose he is guilty. So what? There are over a half-million men who are in the business of preserving peace and your security. That one has fallen by the wayside still

leaves an average I would want to take a chance on.

Get wise to yourself, Arnold. Have you ever stopped to consider just what a policeman is? Doesn't he mean just a little more to you than the man who stands on the corner and blows a whistle at you when you make a left-hand turn against traffic, or a guy with his hand out? Is he just the fellow you sometimes see walking along the street in front of your house, or tearing through dense traffic with a siren screaming? Probably not. You have come to the conclusion that the policeman is a fellow in a blue suit that can be a great bother when you have committed a petty traffic offense, or something of the kind.

Actually the police officer is your personal bodyguard, did you know that? He is being paid by you to do your dirty work, things you wouldn't and couldn't do yourself. He exposes himself to bandits' gunfire so you won't have to. He spends hours in rain and snow watching a doorway or window for some criminal to appear. You wouldn't do it, so you hired him.

And yet, as your employee, he receives less consideration from you, his employer, than any worker in the world. Cursed and abused because he is doing what you pay him to do, he takes it on the chin and grins. Why, I don't know, but he does.

THE only answer to the crime problem of today is the awakening of the public, and their duty toward the police, their police. Every police department in the country should be brought up to a modern standard, regardless of cost. Criminals have unlimited money with which to purchase the most modern equipment. It

(Continued on page 128)

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Follow That Girl!

By TERRY O. K. BURLERSON

ONE look at the million dollars' worth of blonde in the hotel lobby arguing with Steve Voorhees and whammy! as always, my heart took the front seat on a roller coaster. If it hadn't been for her, and Voorhees, and the corpse found yesterday back of the hotel,



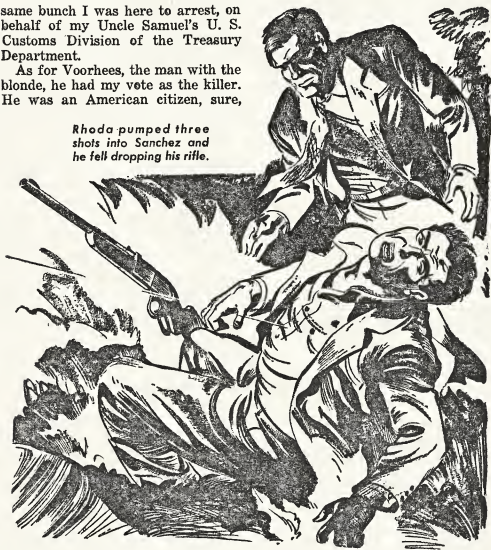
Mrs. Coffey's son, Bill—that's me, you know—wouldn't even have been in Mexico City. As for the corpse, he/it had been one of the hotel desk clerks. He was found in an alley with a hatful of slugs in his brisket, and with his mortality slightly showing. The unofficial report I got was that he tried to put the finger on some dope runners. I supposed it was the

Sure, I was a Treasury Agent on the trail of dope runners, but I couldn't close my eyes to this lovely chick who was somehow tied up to the men I suspected. I hoped she wasn't in the mess too deeply. I found out all about her through a hail of bullets.

same bunch I was here to arrest, on behalf of my Uncle Samuel's U. S. Customs Division of the Treasury Department.

As for Voorhees, the man with the blonde, he had my vote as the killer. He was an American citizen, sure,

Rhoda pumped three shots into Sanchez and he fell dropping his rifle.



but he spent lots of time in this town. He even flew his private plane down here. I had it figured that he was dealing with the opium farmers in the Sierra Madre Mountains, the men who grew the poppies and made the opium and heroin. At any rate, dope was being pushed over the Mexican border into Texas, and I was going to

stop it. I kept telling myself that was my job.

And the girl—Rhoda Fletcher by name, as I had found out—until three days ago I had thought she was a tourist. Now, I wasn't so sure, judging from the way she had sunk her spurs into Voorhees as soon as she hit town. You can learn a lot about a

girl from waiters and bellboys if you're interested enough to spend the kind of dough that buys information. I was interested enough, but the info I got on her wasn't so good. She owned a chain of small drug stores back East. Her high batting average with Voorhees could mean only one thing—dope traffic. But I still thought she was cute—her looks I mean.

I sat across the lobby from her and Voorhees, listening to some heated innuendoes as their verbal battle waxed warmer. I couldn't follow the gist of their conversation, but I was in there giving it the old college try. Rhoda was doing most of the talking. Voorhees seemed more or less amused about something. My guess was his mind was on weightier matters having to do with making a quick buck in a dishonest manner. I knew him for what he was.

VOORHEES abruptly had a frivolous change of mental scenery, judging from his subsequent actions. Over the top of a magazine, I watched his arm. The arm seemed to have a mind and a will of its own. At first on the sofa above Rhoda, it slipped down gradually until it settled like a thrown lariat about her shoulders. Voorhees scooped her in. He shoved his grinning face forward and kissed her. Afterwards, she seemed undecided whether to run, yell, slap him or what.

"Coffey, you're a prefabricated jerk," I told myself while getting up. After all, why get my knob frailed because of her? The gal hadn't even given me a tumble. And goodness knows, I had tried hard enough.

But this bit of logic met with a cool rebuff from the top drawer of my mind. In the first place, I didn't want her hurt—she might know something about Voorhees that I would be interested in. Second place, by playing hero for her, maybe she'd be thank-

ful enough to me and sore enough at Voorhees to talk turkey in court.

But how was I to know I'd be wrong on all counts? I walked toward them. My gaze was mostly centered on Voorhees, but from the southwest corner of one eye I noticed those legs of Rhoda's. Ah, how perfectly formed they were. And those eyes, they looked like—well, they looked like eyes, but on her that was good. And that figure—I bet she modeled for the guys who drew those calendar girls. The ones in bathing suits.

Did I mention that Voorhees had reenforcement? He did. It was an unpretty citizen, Huggins by name. He had a bobbed-off nose, broad eyes, brown frown and no hair. He stood within good shooting distance of me. I was betting he belonged to every crook-of-the-month club in the states.

I was hoping, naively enough, that Voorhees et al didn't suspect my real purpose for being there. All they were supposed to know was that I was a doctor—veterinarian, that is. I had let it be noised abroad that I worked for the U. S. Bureau of Animal Industry. Anthrax, or Aftosa as it was known there in Mexico, or Hoof and Mouth Disease as it was more commonly known in the states, was rampant in Mexico. I had supposedly been assigned to the local office of the U. S. & Mexico Foot and Mouth Disease Commission, my duties being to vaccinate livestock.

But getting back to Rhoda and Voorhees—to further complicate matters, and to mess up an otherwise nice triangle, there was Sanchez, the hotel manager. I couldn't see where he fitted into the picture, but I knew he did somehow. His eyes were too acquisitive with Rhoda and his associations too intimate with Voorhees. I could tell that his interest in Rhoda was more than casual and I didn't like it. Don't ask me why. The doll-eyed blonde gave Sanchez lots of

"come-on," too. She did everybody. Except me.

AFTER Voorhees' amorous little performance, Rhoda's kiss-me mouth was quirked at the corners, as if she had a bad taste in there some place and was wondering if she could get rid of it by spitting.

Voorhees was short and nice-looking and broad and tough and sure of himself. He tried a repeat performance on Rhoda. She slapped him this time. It made a sharp, flat sound.

Voorhees laughed. I looked at Huggins. He was watching me. He wasn't laughing. Icicles dropped down my collar and I almost decided not to play boy scout by boxing Voorhees' ears. That Huggins character looked like a man who would always give you an even break—in both arms.

As for Voorhees, he was built so wide and powerful there hadn't been enough material left to give him much height. The yellow sports shirt he wore was half unbuttoned, exposing enough black chest foliage to stuff a pillow. He wore a built-in grin and looked no more dangerous than a box of explosives. He had a crew haircut and his face and arms were tanned a tobacco juice brown. I heard him make several crude remarks reflecting upon the legitimacy of Rhoda's ancestry. She used on him a bit of diatribe that bordered on the spittoon variety. My ears burned pink. I felt somewhat like a choir boy might feel who has wandered into a pool hall by mistake. The things a cop has to endure—!

I was convinced, however, that Rhoda's honor had been sullied. While I was girding myself for battle, Voorhees hustled her toward the elevator. He apparently intended to finish their argument in his apartment. Huggins went with them.

Too late to catch the first one, I took the next elevator. Voorhees'

apartment was on the fourth floor. I had the bedroom adjoining it. It was no accident that I had it, either. I had kept complaining of various hotel noises until finally, in desperation, they moved me into it—the only one on that floor I hadn't tried.

I quietly closed the door of my room and listened with one ear pressed to the wall. Voorhees was letting his anger unravel a bit, judging from what I could hear. I also heard a muffled splat as a blow was struck. Then I heard Rhoda's sharp cry. That was enough for me. To the rescue, Coffey! Saddle and ride! Caution to the winds, what matters it that you're a Fed! Save the distressed damsel!

I barged into Voorhees' apartment like an infuriated bull. The first person I saw was Rhoda. The print of Voorhees' hand was on her cheek. Huggins stood slouched in one corner. He glanced idly at me. His eyes held malice for all and charity toward none. Rhoda, placing one hand to her cheek, sat down on a sofa.

"I hope I'm not intruding!" I told Voorhees. I stepped forward and banged him on the jaw. It didn't even muss his hair. Like I said before, Voorhees was built like a brick outhouse, and every brick had been laid by a master bricklayer.

Rhoda might have discouraged Voorhees' advances, but she seemed to resent my intrusion for some reason. She glared at me as if she would like to dip me in DDT.

I SWUNG again. Voorhees ducked, but not fast enough. I hit him again, on the same spot, with the same result. I felt pain as a couple of knuckles buckled on me. I wondered if trigger man Huggins was looking at me right now over a pistol barrel.

Voorhees suddenly got under way, moving toward me like a winch truck. He even grew a fresh new smile, as

if he were going to enjoy our little frolic.

Rhoda slid off the sofa and made for the door. I clamped my teeth on a growl. Hereafter, I am not going to lose my temper, twenty times, I told myself. I was down there to catch dope runners, not get my skull hammered in over a floozy who happened to catch my eye.

Huggins' eyes were large and bugged, from thyroid trouble probably. He also had a lot of hook in his nose. At the moment, he was busy as blazes watching Rhoda's rear guard action. I felt my right fist begin to swell. Already it was throbbing.

Voorhees, roaring in to do battle, suddenly pulled the blinds on his smile. He had fists like sledge hammers and they hit the same way. He launched a right hand that would have rendered me defunct had it connected. Fortunately, it didn't.

Since I had long arms, I thought I could fight a long distance war. It was safer, too. I spat him one on the smeller and was just entering into the spirit of the thing when I backed into the sofa. I almost fell. Voorhees was following me up. He got me good. He hit me on the right temple and morning stars appeared. His following trip was more accurate. He skip-bombed this old ex-sailor on the jaw and somebody snuffed my candle.

When I awoke from my nap, I was out in the hall. Several people were standing here and there, speaking of this and that—mostly about me. Closest to me were a couple of nice old Mexican senoras, saying something about the character of the hotel guests nowadays.

I shinnied my arms up my legs until I could chin myself erect. My head made a couple of 360 degree turns and settled back into its usual state of abnormality.

My glance hop-scotched toward

Voorhees' apartment. The door was closed and all was quiet within. I guessed they had departed the premises for the time being.

I hoisted my sagging spirits and fractured ego and made my way toward my room. My jaw made odd clicking noises when I moved it.

Once inside my room, I hustled for the bathroom. I didn't make it—my last meal was lost en route.

"Easy come, easy go," I consoled myself.

I swabbed up the place with a towel and took a shower. I had dressed in tan shorts, blue slacks, white shirt and red tie when the knock came on my door.

THIS time I owed it to myself to protect the old anatomy from further violence. I had a roscoe in one of my bags. I fetched it. It was time I was wearing it anyway. Firearms were generally forbidden in Mexico, but government officials were allowed to have them in their possession, and I was a government official wasn't I?

I walked toward the door, calling myself stupid all the way. Let them knock. If it was Voorhees and Huggins, it meant trouble. But I was a T-man and I loved to play like Humphrey Bogart. Oh yeah!

I pulled back the slide on my automatic, curled a finger around the trigger and opened the door. It was Rhoda. She was alone. Man, she was something—clean and crisp as a bundle of fresh laundry. Her dress fitted as if it had grown there. Her eyes were as gray as wood smoke. The look in them seemed to reach out and slap me in the teeth.

"Ask me in," she said, and smiled. Her voice was like cool water bubbling over the sandy shoal of a brook—you know what I mean, soft and restful and dreamy. The sound of it sent little shivers of ecstasy wriggling up my spine. She wore a brown



Voorhees had fists like sledge hammers and they hit the same way.

alligator bag, slung from one slim shoulder.

I blocked the entrance. Her eyes asked mine to let her into the room. "Don't you trust me?" she asked.

I shook my head. "When I was three months old my mother ran off with a tree surgeon. Since then, hon, I don't trust nobody." I said. I opened the door wider, pocketed my automatic and motioned her inside. I closed the door.

I didn't trust her, yet I liked her

—a lot. Could you tie that? I was wondering how I could take the seat of my pants and yank myself out of this situation. Take the big boss in Washington for instance—how could I explain things to him? I'd say, I didn't arrest the girl because I was nuts about her. And he'd say I was nuts about all women. And I'd say this one was different. And he'd say I was fired. And I'd say I had already quit. Oh, I had myself on a mental merry-go-round all right.

"They told me at the desk you were a doctor," she said.

"At Texas A. & M. College," I said crisply, "they call it *veterinarian!*" Why should I be polite to the dame? Hadn't she run off and let me get my ears hammered down?

Her delovely eyes played tag with

mine and afterwards her glance wandered off by itself to take stock of the surroundings. Finally, it wandered back and centered on me, and this time she took time to size me up. I hoped teacher gave me a passing grade. Perhaps she would even keep me after school and teach me something—about dope.

"All right if I sit down?" she asked.

I felt the skin of my neck getting hot. "Yeah," I said. I wasn't sure what to expect.

HER fingers laced and unlaced. They were nice fingers, long and tapering. I didn't see any rings. There was still hope for me. Come to think of it, however, it might be awkward, wooing her in Sing Sing or some such place.

One hand fumbled with the catch on her purse. She snapped it, open and shut. Open and shut and open. It got on my nerves.

"I came to thank you," she said. "For helping me, I mean."

"It was nothing, really," I said modestly. "Any five or six men could have done as well as I did." The old navy habit, you understand.

She smiled. Her smile was gentle and it had a lot of understanding. I wondered how she had picked it up while speeding through red lights in heavy dope traffic. But maybe I had this babe wrong, I thought. Perhaps she was a Right G after all. Yeah, that was it, I decided. She was just a vacationing waif who had met a werewolf—Voorhees by name, and was about to wander off the straight and narrow. She was in need of a strong character like myself to lend a helping hand.

"I didn't act grateful to you or say what I wanted in Steve's room because—well, Steve is—" she began.

"Steve is a lot of things," I said harshly. "The head of a dope ring to mention one." There, I thought, that

ought to scare her back on the straight and narrow.

Her mouth clamped down until the lips looked as if they had been zippered.

"You're out of your mind!" she said. She arose from her seat, the picture of indignation. "Actually, Steve runs a legitimate trucking business in Dallas," she explained.

Aha! I thought. So she's nuts about him? Well, I would take care of that.

"The trucking is only a sideline with him. His main business is flying dope out of Mexico," I said, giving it to her both barrels. I wanted her reaction.

SHE didn't react the way I thought she would. Standing there, she looked frail and helpless and lovely. But right then I wasn't buying any, for I'd had too many Charley horses in the past from chasing somebody else's dreams around.

"For a horse doctor, you seem to know a lot about Voorhees," she said. Her gray eyes drilled holes in my very soul.

"I've got a large curiosity," I replied.

"Be careful it doesn't get you in trouble."

"Oh, I will."

"Maybe I'll tell Steve what you said about him."

"Do that. And spell my name right. It's C-O-F-F-E-Y! If he ever needs a good horse doctor, tell him to see me."

She walked toward the door. My eyes made like pie plates. Man, she was stacked up. My heart was doing nip-ups. *Coffey*, I told myself, *you got anything to say to the lass, say it now or forever embalm that dream.*

"I, uh—" I mumbled.

She hesitated at the door. "Yes?"

"It's disgraceful the way you're carrying on with Voorhees!" I blurted suddenly.

She grinned and a woman's chal-

lence crawled into her eyes. "Oh, there are others, too. Or didn't you know? Take Sanchez for instance—how about him?" she asked wickedly.

"And how about me?" I replied. It was probably the bravest thing I had said up to now.

"How about you?" she said softly.

"I thought—I was afraid—well—you need seeing after. You're heading straight for trouble," I finally explained. Get me, neighbors—now wasn't that a peachy performance, especially coming from a T-man. Conscience pointed an accusing finger at me. I thought, grimly, that I must spend some time reeducating it. A cop had no business with a conscience in the first place.

Rhoda hesitated at the door. Reaching into her purse, she dragged out a wicked looking little revolver with an abbreviated barrel. After she was sure I had seen it, she let it slip back.

"There's no need for you to worry about me," she said. "No need at all."

"I see what you mean," I replied, as she left. So she had a gun, I told myself—it was nothing really. Lots of nice girls carried guns.

MY THOUGHTS were scampering here and there with the day's happenings when I had my second caller. It was Sanchez. He wore apology upon his broad shoulders and his handsome young face was creased with concern.

I let him inside. He stepped through the door and his quick eyes thoroughly cased the joint. I gave him a bad mark for that on my mental blackboard. His glance came to rest on me. His face was blank of emotion.

"I came to explain something, Senor," he said.

Something about his manner began to make me edgy. I felt of my jaw, a sudden irritation meanwhile starting to nudge me inside.

"Why, whatever would you have to explain?" I asked.

"About why we must insist that you do not see Miss Fletcher again," he said.

My temper arrived on little cat's feet—quietly that is. I felt a red mist squeeze into my eyes and my sore jaw bones popped from biting my teeth so hard. I had had just about all the intrigue I wanted for one night.

I moved closer. I wasn't worried—much. After all, he only outweighed me about twenty pounds. Voorhees out-weighed me almost twice that much. Ever see a flyrod with a cowlick? That was me.

"Make the explanation good, pally, or I part your teeth with my good right hand," I told him.

"Senor Voorhees is a frequent guest at this hotel and we always try to make his visit an enjoyable one. We think he is quite taken with Miss Fletcher and—"

I cocked my right arm. "And just who is 'we'?" I demanded.

"That, Senor, is none of your business," he said.

Before I could frame a suitable reply, one that would definitely strain international relations, he stepped briskly across the room, slammed the door and was gone. I started to follow him and plant one on his kisser, but talked myself out of it. After all, no use in crumming up my record by getting heaved into the local pokey.

I lulled my thoughts to sleep and later dreamed I was knocking Sanchez's and Voorhees' heads together. It was fun. My subconscious was really having itself a time.

I AWOKE about five o'clock the next morning and, as was my custom, took a swim in the pool behind the hotel. I was in the dining room sponging up coffee when Sanchez came in. He sat down beside me. His glance locked horns with mine. I felt the impact.

"I found, quite accidentally, that you're really not a veterinarian at all, Senor Coffey," he said.

"My, my, how you do rave on," I said. "If I'm not a vet, just what is my profession?" The coffee was all at once a pale green taste in my mouth.

"That I don't know," said Sanchez, his voice charged with diplomatic anger. "You might be a member of some big dope ring for all I know. At any rate, we cannot take chances on bad publicity. That is why I am asking that you please leave our hotel."

I had difficulty in constructing a reply. At the same time I was wondering how I had been found out. It was a cinch Sanchez was trying to get rid of me because he knew or suspected I was a Federal operative.

"What if I decide not to move?" I asked.

Sanchez unconsciously moved one hand toward a bulge of his coat, just under the arm. I hadn't noticed it before. I had thought he was a nice, sweet young man.

"I think you can be persuaded," he said, his voice full of winter chill.

I thought so too. Coffey's coffee no longer tasted like coffee, if you know what I mean. I pushed back the cup. People around us were beginning to stare. Sanchez hadn't bothered to keep his voice down. A waitress frowned at him. He glared at me as he got up from the table.

"Please make your arrangements soon, Senor," he said.

My mind tasted of this for an instant before it gave a negative response. I leaped to my feet. Me, a U. S. Government official, being treated this way! He started away.

"Just a minute, you!" I yipped.

He paused, one hand reaching toward his armpit.

"Uh, nothing," I said. "See you around."

"Yes," he said, "as you check out."

He walked away, leaving me to

sulk that over. I was wondering if the coffee I had drunk was going to stay down, when Rhoda and Voorhees walked into the dining room. You ever see an uncovered cover girl? That was Rhoda. She wore a white halter and a short pair of shorts. There were quiet stares and a hush of male awareness in the room. The nose of every senorita and senora went into the air. What Rhoda didn't know was that shorts were frowned upon by Mexican women. Immodest and all that, you know. Customs do vary in different countries.

SHE stopped at my table. She had spotlights behind her eyes to keep them bright. Must have had. She smelled something like a petunia patch. My eyes kept moving down to lamp those gorgeous pins. My training as a swabbie had certainly made me a connoisseur of pins I might add.

Rhoda first looked at me, then at Voorhees. Suddenly, her red, red lips tightening, she sat down at the table beside me. Voorhees, his good morning grin wearing thin, started to take her arm. I felt a hot flash of temper spark inside my skull. Right then, I was a traveling quarrel looking for a place to happen. I was thinking that Voorhees had better run back to his room and give himself a shot in the arm or take a few joy puffs off the weed or whatever he did to keep himself operating, because I felt rough just then.

"I'm going to sit here with Coffey," said Rhoda.

Voorhees shrugged. "What about our plane ride after breakfast?" he asked.

"I've changed my mind," she said.

He frowned, started to say something, didn't, and walked on. He sat two tables away.

I turned to look at Rhoda. She was as cute as a candy rabbit. But her eyes looked very tired and there were faint half circles under them. She



A bullet got Huggins as he was about to pull his trigger.

rubbed them with the tips of her fingers.

"You look dissipated, baby," I said.

She smiled. "Are you going to be here long?" she asked abruptly.

"Why?" I asked, not so kindly. I didn't like for people to be prying into my affairs, even Rhoda. I was a cop and I was supposed to be secretive.

The smile she loaned me was down-quirked at the corners.

"No reason. I was going to say that I'm taking a plane out of here today," she said.

I sipped a glass of ice water. It helped keep the coffee where it belonged—down. And I was beginning to believe that Rhoda was an all right kid.

"You and Voorhees been quarrel-

ing?" I asked. No harm in making sure, I told myself.

"Maybe," she said. I didn't know whether she was joking or serious.

I FELT the nasty side of my nature seeping out. After all, I didn't like to be second choiced. "Wouldn't he sell you the opium and heroin you wanted?" I asked. After all, she could have come down here to buy the stuff, found that Voorhees had the market cornered, and tried to make a deal with him. She might even have shook her lips at him a time or two, and still no dice. Could be, I thought.

Her temper came up like a summer storm. "Why, you sagebrush horse doctor, I'll—"

"Don't yell, sweetheart, people will think we're married," I told her. Then, "There is the slight matter of getting reservations on the plane," I said. "Have you tried?"

I watched uncertainty walk up and sit down in her lap. "Why, no," she said. "I thought—"

"Better check on it," I said, hoping she couldn't make the reservations—I had other plans for her. I had already gone into a huddle with my conscience and Conscience had affixed its official stamp of approval. I might as well mix business with pleasure. It wasn't safe for her here, not while Voorhees was around. The Mexican policia couldn't be depended upon. My Department's experience with them in the past had been that about half of them were sympathetic to and sometimes in league with the dope runners. That being true, the safest place for Rhoda, if she was on the level—and I should know before I got her out of Mexico—was back in the states. I had some friends in Laredo, Texas. She could stay with them until I could gather enough evidence against Voorhees.

While Rhoda went to the telephone, to call the airline ticket office, Voorhees alternately ate waffles and

glared across at me. I watched while he poured gobs of syrup in his plate. I hoped he went quietly off and died of acute indigestion. Huggins walked into the room, spotted Voorhees, and walked toward him. He sat down at Voorhees' table. He ordered coffee. While waiting for it, he glanced across at me. It wasn't a friendly glance.

Rhoda still hadn't returned when Voorhees finished his breakfast. He wiped his mouth, lighted a cigarette and pushed back his chair. He and Huggins walked toward me. Huggins kept one hand in his coat pocket. To keep it warm no doubt. Voorhees was wearing his best Sunday-go-to-meeting smile again.

He stopped beside me. Huggins eased up alongside. He jammed his pocket out and something hard and metallic bumped me between the fifth and sixth vertebrae. It felt like the bore of a .45 caliber gun muzzle. But then I couldn't be sure.

"Keep away from Rhoda," Voorhees said quietly, "or they'll find you lying horizontal, in the alley."

MY BLOOD turned to chilled tomato juice and my scalp felt too tight for my hair. It wasn't that I was afraid of dying—I was simply scared to quit living. If you know what I mean.

"You trying to scare me?" I asked Voorhees.

"Yeah," said Huggins. His voice was like a file drawn slowly over cold metal.

"You're doing fine," I said. "Where do we go from here?"

The gun left my back. When I turned around, Voorhees was walking away, flanked by Huggins. They were gone before Rhoda came back to my table. She sat down beside me.

"You were right," she said, and her face admitted defeat. "I can't leave for at least four days, due to the heavy vacation travel."

"If it's important that you leave, I'm driving up to Laredo, Texas," I said. "If you want to help drive, we'll go straight through without stopping." I wouldn't tell her yet of my plans for her. The plans ultimately involved a preacher and I hardly thought this the time to speak of this and that sort of thing.

Her eyes lighted with new hope. "I'll be ready in less than an hour," she said.

"Call me at my room when you're ready," I said, hoping I didn't appear too eager.

She phoned me at my room in a little over thirty minutes. My bags were packed. I let a boy carry them down. I had paid my bill earlier. I had paid Rhoda's at the same time. She could pay me back later. I didn't want any last minute delays. I was expecting trouble.

I wasn't disappointed. It side-swiped me as I got off the elevator. It came in the person of Voorhees and Huggins. When my glance picked up Rhoda, she was standing next to the desk, surrounded by four bags. She had one hand in her purse.

Voorhees walked toward me slowly, like a heavy truck. He stopped four feet away. He was fresh out of smile.

"I understand Rhoda is leaving," he said.

"You been reading her mail," I said.

"She has something that belongs to me," he said. "I want it."

Any other statements he might have made were interrupted by the right hook I tossed his way. I put all of my one hundred and sixty pounds into it. I felt my sore knuckles holler, but the blow landed him right to his patsy. He sat on it awhile, thought things over and started to get up, one hand reaching for his coat pocket. I felt of his jaw with the toe of my shoe, doing my dead level best to put a permanent wave in it.

Huggins was very deliberate in pulling his gun, as if he had all the time in the world. His upper lip was beaded with sweat and his mouth was like an appendectomy scar. I didn't have a ghost of a chance to draw my own gun, but decided I'd make a try—I had nothing to lose.

"In the belly, Chum!" Huggins promised.

RHODA shot him in the shoulder. He stumbled, sagged, but didn't go down. He must have been squeezing off the trigger when Rhoda shot twice more. One of them got him in the leg. He dropped his gun and sat down on the floor, as if for a rest. He seemed uninterested in further action.

I quickly scanned the lobby to see if Sanchez was about. He wasn't. I didn't know why exactly, but I figured that he was going to take a very dim view of what had just transpired. And he would no doubt call out the police.

Telling my feet to calm down, I motioned for a frightened bellboy to carry our luggage to the parking lot behind the hotel. He loaded it into the trunk compartment. I gave him five pesos. He ran off without thanking me.

I opened the door of my not-so-new convertible and Rhoda stepped inside. I walked around and climbed in on the other side. I drove past Paseo de la Reforma, remaining on Avenida Insurgentes as long as I could, then had to detour because of road construction. I didn't get back on the Pan American Highway until we were out of the city limits. Rhoda was silent beside me. She seemed remarkably composed, considering everything. I wondered how far up the road we'd get before either the Mexican Policia or Voorhees caught us.

Meanwhile, I watched the wind tug at her hair and at the white sheer

blouse she had slipped on for the trip. She wore a dark skirt and black alligator shoes.

"You're wondering if I have something that belongs to Voorhees," she said.

"How did you ever guess?" I asked.

The faintest suggestion of a smile tugged at the corners of her mouth.

"You're such a child in some things. Say, for example, that I was stealing marijuana or some kind of dope from him. How would I go about getting it past the customs inspectors at Laredo?" she asked.

"You tell me," I said. But I was relieved. Coffey, I told myself, this little old girl is true blue. She'll make a wonderful mother for the nine kids you're going to have.

Under ordinary circumstances, I was a very conservative driver. Under the present circumstances, I was a ball of fire. I drove almost eighty miles an hour when there were no curves. I hoped nitrogen bubbles weren't forming in my blood stream. And I should have my head examined, I thought. Just because a girl had nice legs and a wonderful, wonderful way of smiling at me, I had to stick my neck away away out and go off charging windmills with a broken lance. And to climax my troubles, my heat indicator said the radiator water was boiling. Speed and hard mountain climbing was too much for it. I had to slow down somewhat.

Now that's just fine, I told myself. If we were being followed we were sitting ducks now.

BUT time passed and still no sign of pursuit. We were beginning to breathe more easily. I kept a quart thermos bottle in the back seat. We stopped in Zimapan and had it filled with coffee. We were nearing Jacala when trouble caught us.

First came the car. It was a fawn gray coupe, almost new. It was coming like a comet. There was only one

man in it. I felt like, for some reason, that it was Sanchez. Whoever it was started blazing away at us with a gun. The windshield splintered between Rhoda and me. I heard another bullet thuck into the back of the trunk compartment. I pushed hard on the accelerator about the time he got my right rear tire. When the car started to yaw wildly, I began to stop.

"Wait!" said Rhoda. "You can't!"

"Watch me!" I said. We were in the high Sierra Madre range of mountains and I didn't want to lose any altitude. Not suddenly.

Rhoda was opening her purse when I pulled to a corner of the road and stopped. Sanchez stopped behind us. He got out of his car, carrying a lever action rifle. Gone was his cool veneer. His glance at Rhoda was actually one of hatred.

"You surely didn't think you could get away with this?" he asked.

"I don't know what you're talking about!" she said. It wasn't an original remark, I thought. This sparkling little bit of conversation slightly nauseated me. And I looked toward the forthcoming events with no great amount of anticipation. I figured they were likely to upset my dream boat.

"Let me see your luggage," growled Sanchez.

"And if I don't?" Rhoda asked stoutly. Her purse was open I noticed, but she didn't have her gun—yet.

I stood there, my teeth clicking like castanets. Let's face it—I was no hero. I searched the side streets and back alleys of my mind for a way out of this. But there was none. I had an idea that this Sanchez character was entertaining the thought of putting us in an obituary column someplace.

Sanchez jabbed his rifle suggestively.

"You'll give us the same treat-

ment, even if I let you see my luggage," said Rhoda.

He moved closer, anger riding his shoulders. He addressed me this time. "The stuff!" he said. "Get it!"

The rifle looked very persuasive. Had I known where the *stuff* he had in mind was, I probably would have given it to him.

I had already made up my mind to jump Sanchez, come what may, when I heard the plane coming. It was about time, I thought, for I had been wondering what was holding up Voorhees. Perhaps I had kicked him harder than I thought. Or maybe he had to have a broken jaw wired up before he left.

WE ALL heard the plane before it was visible. When we did see it, its wheels were barely clearing the top of the mountain ahead of us. It angled steeply down. A sub-machine gun in the plane took up a *tutta-tutta*. Little brown puffs of dust exploded in front of us. Then, just as quickly, the plane was gone. Gone to circle and make another try. I crouched to spring at Sanchez. He was way ahead of me. His rifle lined up with my belt buckle.

"Inside the car, both of you!" he said.

I took Rhoda's hand and hustled her inside the coupe. I guessed Sanchez was going to drive until he found a place to use for protection. Here, there was nothing. The side of the mountain was as bald as an egg.

Sanchez got in. He drove with his right hand and kept the rifle in his left. Mexican hotel managers were very versatile, I thought. Who knows, maybe they all did thriving business on the side, shoving dope.

Rhoda sat between Sanchez and myself. Behind us, I heard the plane roaring in. I braced myself for a hot shower of lead slugs in my back. Rhoda's hand did a submarine into her purse. I wondered what Sanchez

would do if he knew her hot little fingers were wrapped around the cold butt end of a gun.

Sanchez kicked the coupe up to almost fifty miles an hour before he ever shifted out of second gear. We went skidding around a sharp curve. Voorhees picked that time to cut down on us with the tommy gun. He must have shot the rear tires completely off the car. The coupe kept going, straight off the side of the mountain.

My heart ballooned inside me. The car was just leaving the road when I yanked open the door, grabbed Rhoda around the neck and plunged out. Sanchez and the car went on over.

Rhoda and I hit the side of the road shoulder, with me on bottom. We must have rolled for thirty feet, along the side of the embankment. Earth and sky mixed together to form great bursts of light and pain. When I finally did stop moving, I simply laid there and waited for my broken bones to start hurting.

I felt Rhoda stir beside me. I wiggled first my hands and arms, then my feet and legs. I tasted the salty brine of blood in my mouth. I felt of my face. Half an acre of hide was missing up there. So what? It would grow back. I climbed to my feet.

Rhoda was trying the same thing. I helped her. Dirt and grass and rocks were all mixed in her hair. Both stockings were torn, one of them almost off. Blood was seeping out of a bad scratch on her knee. Her purse was missing.

"You all right?" I asked.

It was a long while before she answered. "I think so," she said. She found her purse. The gun was still inside it.

WE LIMPED toward the side of the embankment. The car had landed thirty feet below in a tangle of trees and vines. We watched while

Sanchez crawled out of a window. He barely made it before the car crashed on through, toward the open side of the mountain. It finally came to rest in a banana orchard, almost a mile below. It was reduced to scrap iron.

"Wait here," I told Rhoda.

The embankment wasn't so very steep down to where Sanchez had pulled himself. When I got to him, he still clutched his rifle. I put my arms under his back and tried to move him. He screamed in agony. I felt a sticky wetness back there. I drew my arms away, expecting to see blood. It wasn't. It was a clear sort of mucous, leaking out of his back. I knew then that he was a goner. He climbed to his knees. There was an unholy expression on his face as he glared up at Rhoda. He tried to raise his rifle. I knew he wouldn't ever make it.

Rhoda must have known it, too, that's why I was surprised when she pumped three fast shots at him. One of them got him in the chest. Another tore into his face. Sanchez pitched forward on his face.

I took the dead man's rifle, wondering if Rhoda's actions were going to curdle the dream in my mind.

"He was going to shoot you," she said, in defense of her actions. There was an indignant look on her face, like a prim little girl who has just slapped the boy who tried to take away her candy.

"Yeh, he was sure going to shoot me," I said.

I had forgotten about Voorhees until I heard his plane coming in again. I scrambled up the side of the cliff, took Rhoda's hand and we ran—limped back to my car. At least the car offered a little protection.

I got Rhoda under the convertible and was crouched behind the side of it when Voorhees came in. He was making his approach from the east. I started shooting as soon as I could

see him. No good. I emptied the rifle magazine long before Voorhees opened fire with his sub-machine gun.

THE plane came so close I could see he had one window of the little high wing monoplane cranked open and that his hands clutched a sub-machine gun. He must have been flying the plane with his feet. It was painted a silver color, all but the nose. It was red. The colors made the plane stand out clearly.

Low-crawling clouds pushed past us on the highway, partly around us, partly below us. I could no longer see Sanchez's wrecked car. There, in the cloud mist, everything seemed ghostly and unreal. This couldn't be happening to me. Not the plane, not the heavy rain of bullets.

I reached inside the car for that quart thermos of coffee. Why not? I read in the paper once where a guy did it with a beer can. Voorhees came in closer this time, so he could see us through the mist. He was shooting below his propeller arc. His slugs gnawed a slice of fender beside me. I ventured a look above the top of the car. By that time the plane's propeller looked as big as a windmill. I heaved the thermos out and up, straight into the arc. Then I ducked.

Something made a terrific racket. I decided later that it was his motor vibrating after part of his prop broke off. Voorhees couldn't get hold of his controls quickly enough after that. He flew straight into the side of the mountain. The plane burned. So did Voorhees. And there was nothing I could do about it, even if I wanted to, which I didn't.

Rhoda didn't seem particularly sorry. I knew I wasn't.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

"Yes, and you?" she asked.

"Check with me later," I said. I helped her from under my car and placed an arm about her waist. It was a nice waist, and—well, nice. It

was with reluctance that I turned my attention to the flat tire.

While I changed the wheel, Rhoda watched me. She was wearing a curious expression about her eyes. She pointed a finger toward a hole in the tire. A bullet had nicked the rubber and made a rather deep gash in it. It looked rather bad.

"Driving with that spare on will be dangerous," she said. "Can't you fix the other tire?"

"No can do," I said. "Besides, the spare will get us to Texas."

I LOADED the flat tire and the wheel back of the luggage in the trunk compartment. My mind was shifting out of low gear and was telling me unkind things about myself.

"What is it you have of Voorhees' that Sanchez was trying to pull a swifty and steal from both of you?" I asked.

She turned to face me. Her stare met my own. "Don't be silly. What would I have of Voorhees'?" she asked. Then, "Tell me, Coffey, who are you anyway? You're no veterinarian."

"You asking or telling?" I said.

"Telling. Now give me the truth."

"Undercover agent of the U. S. Customs Division of the Treasury Department who is no longer under cover," I said. "And unless you can sing it pretty, Rhoda, you're in trouble."

"A narcotics dick, huh?" she asked. "Sounds impressive." She looked impressed. If I had been expecting her to betray her emotions, I was disappointed.

"Okay," she said, "I'll tell you what I know. Voorhees was an old friend, believe it or not. We knew each other back when. I took a lot of abuse from him, sure, but just charged it off for old times sake."

"Yeah, yeah, I bet he beats his mother, too, and that he's unkind to

children," I growled. "Tell me something I want to know."

"I believe Voorhees and Sanchez are in league with a smuggling ring," she said. She paused and shrugged her shoulders. They were pretty shoulders, I thought in passing.

"I'm only guessing, you understand, but my guess is that they thought I copped some opium or maybe heroin. No doubt that was why they were so hot and bothered."

"No doubt," I said. I was wondering if she was leveling with me or was simply being very careless with the truth. But after all, I was in love with the girl wasn't I? And the feeling was mutual I thought. Better should I give her the benefit of the doubt.

I started the car and we drove away. I settled down to some steady driving.

"Don't forget that bad tire," she warned.

I glanced around at her. Man, oh, man, but she was some punkins. If she really was a dope hustler, she was the niftiest one I had ever got crossed up with. But her being anything except a good, clean American girl was foolishness of course. . . .

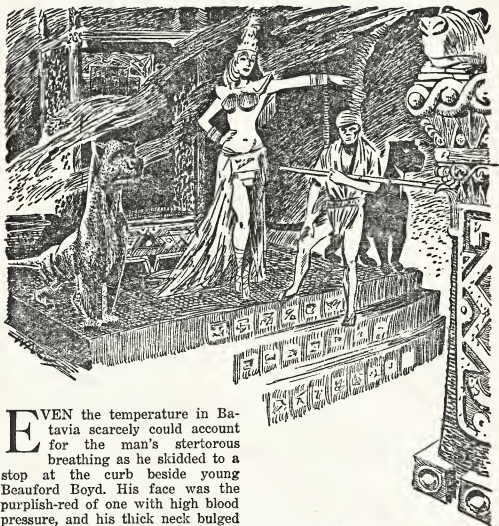
"You're a pretty swell guy, Coffey," she tells me.

I PRACTICALLY swooned with delight. Her words warmed every nook and chilly cranny of my heart. The wind whistled in at the bullet holes in my windshield. But I didn't mind. After all, I had Rhoda. She closed the gap between us. Conscience perched on my shoulder and screeched in my ear. I paid it no heed. I had a short memory when I was around that babe. I had already forgotten she had put the blooie to Sanchez.

Wow, how that girl could kiss? I almost ran us off the side of a mountain.

(Continued on page 116)

THE BAMBOO DEATH



EVEN the temperature in Batavia scarcely could account for the man's stertorous breathing as he skidded to a stop at the curb beside young Beauford Boyd. His face was the purplish-red of one with high blood pressure, and his thick neck bulged between the collar of his tropical suit and expensive Panama hat. There was something distinctly American about him, even before he spoke.

"I need help." The man's low voice was hoarse, and he spoke out of the side of his mouth. "Don't look at me—

don't speak. Just keep this for me until I call for it."

Beau felt the painter's case, in which he carried his tubes and brushes, jerked from his hand, and something else substituted in its

In the exotic tropics of the Far East, anything can happen—and plenty happened to an American artist who had a package thrust into his hands by a man who, a few moments later, was sprawled in the street, a corpse!

By
CLINT MURDOCK

was forced back by a small tram, whistle screaming. Again he leaped from the curb, swearing angrily as the Panama hat of the stranger disappeared across the street. He dodged around a hand-cart with its towering load of mangoes, melons, red chili peppers, and yams. The singing coolie who pushed the cart, stopped open-mouthed as Beau vaulted to the



Looking up, Beau saw Melali dragged in by two Chinese.

place. Then the red-faced American dashed heedlessly across the busy street, barely missing a stout *mijnheer* pedaling to work, his leather portfolio strapped high on the handlebars of his cycle.

Beau looked down at his hand. He held a small black case somewhat like his own. What was the matter with that guy? Didn't he know oil paints were expensive?

"Hey!" Beau yelled in outraged surprise. He plunged headlong into the crowded *Pasar Baroe* in pursuit of the man in the tropical suit, but



opposite curb just a second before the fender of an automobile whooshed past.

Beau was thankful for his six-foot-two, which enabled him to see above the bobbing turbans and colorful parasols. Parasols? Subconsciously his painter's mind registered the vivid reds and greens. But no yellows. A frown puckered his brow. Somewhere just recently, he'd seen a powerful black car of imported make, with a yellow parasol attached to the emblem on the hood. Then he saw the red-faced American turn into a side street. It jerked his mind from the parasols, and he stretched his long legs in a sprint to overtake the man.

A crowd had begun to gather at the mouth of the narrow side street when he reached it. He elbowed his way closer to a small shop whose perpendicular ideographic sign proclaimed that its owner was Chinese.

Stretched out, one hand grasping at the door-sill, lay the man he'd been following. His hands were empty. The painter's case was gone.

A young Chinese was kneeling beside the prone body, feeling for a pulse. He looked up through spectacles so strong they distorted his eyes, and there was a flash of gold teeth as he spoke.

"This man is dead," he said tonelessly, and his accent was that of a man educated in English schools.

BEAU looked around at the crowd which had gathered. The Malayan faces of the Javanese natives were blandly impersonal.

A thin Englishman asked, "How was he killed?"

The young Chinese shrugged. "That will be for the police to say," he answered indifferently.

"Look." A stout Dutchman pointed to a hole in the back of the dead man's coat from which hung a string of *kapok*. He leaned forward and

pulled. A bamboo splinter about two inches long, bound with a wisp of *kapok*, came away in his hand. As if a stopper had been removed, the wound began to bleed profusely.

"Don't touch that!" the Englishman said sternly. "That's a blow-pipe dart, undoubtedly poisoned. The police will want it."

Beau had seen the natives in the *kampong* where he had taken a house, use these blow-pipes to rid their gardens of marauding squirrels and monkeys. He'd watched, with amazement, as his own house-boy, Ah-Mat, would raise the eight-foot bamboo pipe to his lips, puff, and with unerring accuracy send the needle-pointed splinter of poisoned bamboo to a vulnerable spot.

He heard the slip-slap of bare feet running, and turned, to see a *mata-mata* hurrying toward them. The sight of the native policeman, in his white uniform, jerked Beau back to thought of his own peril. He didn't want to be questioned just now; not until he figured out what it was all about. Not until he'd looked into the black case the murdered man had thrust into his hand.

He eased his way out of the crowd and back into the doorway of a shop. He stepped into the dusky interior, eyes still dazzled by the white sunlight outside. A tall *Mevrouw*, blonde hair framing her face in a long bob, came toward him. She held out a hand.

"I'll take the case now," she said softly.

BEAUFORD BOYD had always heard that a drowning man's whole life flashed before him in those last few seconds. Now as he stood facing the vicious little gun held so steadily in the blonde's hand, something similar happened to him. He'd been in the air force during the war, and had been forced down in Java on

one of his flights. He'd been entranced with the magical little island, and had promised himself he'd come back after the war, to paint the colorful land and its inhabitants. And come back he had, with money enough to live on for two years while he painted—or so he hoped—in the bold colorful style of Gauguin.

Now as the statuesque blonde held out a hand for the black case, and with the other pointed a gun at him, the rueful thought came to him that he'd come all that distance only to be killed in a musty little shop in Batavia.

"I'll take the case *now*," the woman repeated, and beneath the soft pink flesh he saw her jaw-line was hard and ruthless.

"Like hell you will!" Beau snarled. "Why should I give it to you? Who're you, anyway?"

The black case had been entrusted to him, and he was going to keep it until some very good reason made him change his mind. He could have appreciated the lovely legs that moved the beautiful blonde closer to him, if his eyes hadn't been fastened on that gun, and if the blue eyes above it hadn't held such cold ruthlessness.

Instinctively he stepped back, away from the out-thrust gun, and found himself on the doorstep of the shop. Did he dare make a break for it, he wondered?

"Give it to me, or I'll scream," the girl hissed.

"Scream and be damned!" Beau sneered, secure in the thought that she dared not shoot now in view of all those people in the street. Nor did he think she'd scream. But he was wrong. He nearly dropped the black case as a piercing screech keened the air.

It was a shrill scream, and jerked the eyes of the native policeman in their direction. Hurriedly the *mata-mata* forced his way through the

crowd that had gathered around the body of the dead American, and ran toward Beau. Scores of eyes turned his way.

THE thing Beau least wanted had happened. He'd wanted no attention called to himself. Whoever had stolen his painter's case, after murdering the American, would soon enough know who he was. His name was printed in bright gold letters inside that case. The blonde girl was obviously Dutch, and Java was a Dutch possession. He wouldn't stand a chance with the local constabulary. A miserable feeling of inadequacy surged over him. He gulped, and prepared to argue his side with his deficient control of the native speech.

"Let me do the talking." The new voice at his side was a low contralto, and a slim golden hand with almond shaped nails slid through his arm. The blonde was looking very appealing and helpless, the gun no longer in sight, as she stated her case to the policeman.

Breaking in on the blonde, the girl holding Beau's arm loosed a patter of words in that lilting soft language of the island. Beau saw the frown of anger pass from the policeman's face, and a smile take its place. He turned to Beau as if for confirmation.

"I told him," the girl murmured, "that you were my employer, and I saw this woman," she gestured toward the blonde, "I saw her try to steal your black case. But, I told him, since she wasn't successful, you didn't want her arrested. Isn't that right?"

"Yes," Beau nodded, feeling extremely foolish.

The *mata-mata* bobbed happily, and waved them away. He had enough on his hands. Beau looked for the blonde, intending to enjoy her discomfiture, but she was nowhere to be seen.

HE FELT himself being forced gently away from the scene of action by the hand on his arm, and for the first time looked at his rescuer. He whistled involuntarily. The girl was a slim, honey-colored Eurasian, and came about to his shoulder. Her heavy black hair was pulled into a knot at the nape of her neck. A severely tailored white suit accented the positive curves under it, and a smart red scarf filled in the neckline. Slim feet in absurdly high-heeled red pumps hurried to keep pace with his long strides.

"Why do you whistle?" she asked.

"Because inside of fifteen minutes I've seen two girls beautiful enough to walk through the portals of the Ziegfeld Follies." Beau smiled, pulling his arm tight to his side, imprisoning her hand. "Besides, it's a good old American custom."

"Mr. Boyd," she said, "what I did was in the line of duty—"

"How'd you know my name?" He stopped short in amazement.

"Mr. Arnold—the dead man back there—was my boss," she said, and Beau noticed that the honey-colored skin was drawn tight over high cheek-bones. "We used to see you come into the hotel before you moved to your home. Now, if you'll just give me the black case, I'll not bother you any more."

"What's in the case that makes everyone so anxious to get their hands on it?" Beau asked. "I'm going straight home and have me a look." He started walking again.

"But I tell you, Mr. Arnold would want you to give it to me," the girl pleaded, pattering along at his side.

"Can you tell me what's in it?" His blue eyes probed her dark ones, slanted exotically in her slender face.

"No-o-o," she admitted, catching her red lower lip between her teeth.

"Then come along, and we'll both look," he told her. "I owe you that

much for getting me out of that jam back there. By the way, what's *your* name?"

"Melali," she said simply, and the round lovable syllables rolled into the sunshiny day like pebbles in a blue pool.

NEITHER of them spoke until he swung open the gate in the split-bamboo fence around his little house, which was one of three in the native *kampong*. It nestled in its own garden of scarlet hibiscus and golden alamada.

His house-boy, immaculate in white drill jacket and a sarong twisted around his middle, leaving his skinny legs bare and brown below it, hurried to open the door for them.

"Toean—master," he bowed.

"Something cool too drink, Ah-Mat," Beau said.

As the boy moved away softly on bare feet, Beau drew up two fan-backed rattan chairs to a teak-wood table, and placed the black case upon it. The lock yielded easily, and he threw open the top.

He heard Melali's indrawn breath as she leaned eagerly forward. But her eyes were not on the sheaf of banknotes which the case held, but were staring avidly, striving to read the typed pages that lay beside them.

The top page held a list of names, and the other sheets were closely typed. As Beau started to read the list of names aloud, Melali leaned forward quickly and laid a cool golden hand across his mouth, just as Ah-Mat glided in with two tall glasses on a woven tray. The house-boy's eyes, too, rested unnecessarily long on the contents of the case; but no doubt he'd never seen so much money all at one time before, Beau thought.

"That'll be all, Ah-Mat," Beau said, and the boy left them.

Together Beau and Melali bent over the papers, reading hurriedly.

The money evidently was to pay those on the accompanying list for bombing a railway station and waylaying a shipment of gold.

"Well," Beau said, looking up from the papers in his hand, "there is obviously one place only for all this—the police." He took a long sip of fruit juice.

"No!" Melali said sharply. "You must not—it is not yours to give. Your compatriot, Mr. Arnold, entrusted it to you." Melali was beautiful in her earnestness. "You must give it to me, to continue his work."

BEAU felt a sharp stab of disappointment. How could she be on the side of lawlessness and disorder?

"What kind of a rat do you think I am?" he said, glowering at her, blue eyes stormy under the straight brown brows. "American or no American, I'm not the guy to help along any subversive group." He turned back to the black case and started packing the papers and banknotes. "And you'll just come along, my lovely lady, and explain your boss's hook-up with all this." He snapped the case shut, and turned to face Melali.

Where she had been, now there was only an empty chair—well, not quite empty; a glint of yellow caught his eye. He leaned forward and picked up a small umbrella about the size of a pencil, a child's toy. It must've dropped from her purse, he thought, and stuck it in his breast pocket. He felt himself hoping that he'd see Melali again, so he could return it to her. He picked up the black case and started for the door.

Then he realized that he dared not go through the streets with that black case. Already two people had tried to take it from him, and someone had committed murder trying to gain possession of it. Melali, knowing

what it was, would no doubt return with help. He'd never reach the police. No, the thing to do was to find a safe place for it, then go to the police.

He sent Ah-Mat out on an errand. Then he prowled around, looking for a likely place to secrete it. Finally he lifted one corner of the *bilik*, the interwoven sheet of split-bamboo which covered the walls and ceilings of the house, and put the case behind it. He replaced the *bilik* carefully, obliterating every sign of what he'd done.

AS HE left the kampong, Beau tried to shrug off the feeling of impending danger. Several small boys were flying singing kites, those decorative kites shaped like birds and flowers. They rode high in the intense blue of the sky, and the wind sang softly through the small section of bamboo with a reed at the base of the kite. A woman with a broom made of rice-straw, swept the path to her house. It was all so calm and normal-looking.

He kept, however, to the shopping center on the Pasar Baroe. The narrow street was crowded at all times of the day with Europeans, and he felt safer there as he strode rapidly toward his destination.

A touch on his arm whirled him around, heart pounding. Only then did he realize that his mind had not been completely absorbed in the unique sights and sounds around him. Some portion of his brain had been waiting for something to happen.

His face creased in a relieved smile as he recognized Ah-Mat, his house-boy.

"*Toean*," Ah-Mat bowed low, "the lady returned with this note. I come quick to find you." He held out a small piece of note paper in his brown fingers.

Beau flipped open the folded sheet.

"Have something to tell you," it read. "Meet me at Goh Siang's importing shop at once." It was signed "*Melali*."

"Thanks, Ah-Mat," he said.

"Where is Goh Siang's shop?"

"A short distance, *Toean*, near the native market," Ah-Mat said. "Now I return to make master's dinner."

Beau's blood tingled at the thought of seeing Melali again so soon, and he hastened his steps to the importing shop. Any fears he might have that Melali was likely to trick him, were soothed by the thought that the shop was one patronized by everyone, and it was still bright daylight. He found it, and stepped inside. The young Chinese who had bent over the murdered American advanced to meet him, light from the windows glancing across the gold teeth as he smiled widely.

"The gentleman is prompt," he intoned, but Beau could not read the expression behind those thick glasses.

He heard the swish of feet behind him, tried to whirl, but something clubbed at the back of his head, and he plunged forward into blackness.

THE bright tropical moonlight made strange shadows on the ground as Beau painfully opened his eyes. What caused those life-like, terrifying shadows? Then he realized that he was lying on the ground in one of the inner courts of the *Boroboedoe*. When he first came to Batavia, he'd spent many days rambling around this famous Buddhist temple, examining its elaborate low-relief carvings.

He groaned and sat up, ran a hand through his brown hair.

"The foreign one comes to his senses, *Mevrouw Ridahl*," a voice said from the shadows.

"Bring him before me," said another voice. A strangely familiar voice. Beau blinked his eyes to clear

them of the fog induced by that blow on the head in the importing shop, and tried to remember where he'd heard it.

"Perhaps the hard-headed American will be more apt to listen to reason now," the voice intoned.

Beau's eyes stabbed toward the voice. Seated there on a throne-like stone, was the glorious blonde who had pointed a gun at him earlier in the day.

"Now perhaps he will tell us where the black case is," the blonde continued.

Inwardly Beau gloated. So he'd been too smart for them. They hadn't found it. He clamped his mouth shut on a desire to laugh, and shook his head.

"So he still refuses. Ah-Mat, Si Irpan, string him up by the thumbs." The blonde's voice was as cold and tinkling as ice-cubes in a gleaming glass.

In amazement, Beau watched his house-boy come toward him. Now there was no subservience in the little man's manner. And he suddenly remembered that Melali had laid her hand on his lips while Ah-Mat was in the room serving their drinks. Then he thought of the note Ah-Mat had brought him. Had Melali written it? Apparently not. Then just where did *she* fit into this crazy puzzle? Was she friend or foe?

As the two men jerked his hands together behind him, he opened his mouth to protest. They couldn't do this to him. He was an American, catapulted into this mess through no will of his own.

"Wait," *Mevrouw* said. "Some one comes."

INTO the moonlit area came three people, and Beau's heart began to beat painfully fast. The one in the middle was Melali—a disheveled Melali, whose midnight hair hung

loose around her piquant face. Guarding her closely were two Chinese.

"We found her, Mevrouw Ridahl," said one of the men, addressing the blonde respectfully. "She had the black case." He left Melali in the custody of the other Chinese and took the case to the blonde.

"Obviously the Eurasian woman put up a struggle," Mevrouw Ridahl sneered. "How bright burns the flame of patriotism."

Melali spat venomously in the blonde's direction.

Mevrouw Ridahl ignored her. "You say, Ah-Mat, that she and the American read the names aloud when they opened the case?"

"Yes, Mevrouw. I waited outside the door for a time. They know, too, what orders the case contains, and the purpose of the banknotes," Ah-Mat said.

"Then they must not go free," the blonde said. "Secure them both. We no longer need torture the American—we now have the case in our possession."

"Wait," Beau said. "If I must die, at least let me speak to Melali for a moment."

For the first time since she had come into the temple, Melali saw him. Her dark eyes widened in fright and distress. Mevrouw Ridahl nodded consent. She was like some high priestess, Beau thought, royally granting a slight reprieve to the condemned.

"Melali," Beau said, and his voice was harsh. This was the girl who'd been associated with the murdered American. He hated to think what sordid conspiracy his compatriot had been a party to. "Tell me what the American, Arnold, had to do with this."

Melali's eyes glistened with unshed tears.

"He was a great man, a good man. He was working with us—with the

patriots. These people"—a sweep of her slender arm grouped the queer assortment of Javanese, Chinese, and Dutch—"are working for a foreign power. They would destroy my country. Today Mr. Arnold, your countryman, waylaid their messenger and took the black case with those incriminating papers—the first real evidence we've been able to get. But they were close on his heels, that was why he gave you the case. They caught up with him a few minutes later, and killed him"—her eyes flicked over Ah-Mat, who still stood beside Beau—"as you know, with the weapon which is sure death in the hands of a native."

"Then why wouldn't you let me go to the police?" Beau asked.

"I wanted revenge." Then her eyes softened. "I'm sorry you are caught. I do not mind dying. Always there will be other patriots to fill my place. But you had no part in it. It's unfair that you must die." She jerked free from her captor and ran to Beau, burying her face against his chest.

"Enough of this," Mevrouw Ridahl said jeeringly. "We must get on with the night's work. Si Irpan, Ah-Mat, tie them up."

AS THE men approached, Beau lifted Melali's face and kissed the warm red lips. Her cheeks were wet with tears, and he reached into his breast pocket for his handkerchief. The little yellow parasol fell out, opened, and floated slowly to the floor.

A gasp greeted its appearance, and the two men stopped dead in their tracks. Beau looked at the startled faces around him, but was galvanized into instant action as Melali grabbed his hand.

"Quick! Come quick!" she urged.

They raced for the stairs to the nearest corridor.

(Continued on page 117)

GAIL FORD... GIRL FRIDAY

in
"DIME-A-DANCE DEATH!"

THE EARLY-MORNING DISCOVERY OF A FLOATING BODY BRINGS INSPECTOR MADSON OF HOMICIDE AND MAC, HIS ASSISTANT, TO THE WATERFRONT...

by KEATS PETREE.



LOOK'S LIKE HE'S BEEN IN THE WATER A FEW DAYS!

SOMEBODY SURE FLATTENED OUT HIS SKULL!

LATER, IN MADSON'S OFFICE...

HIS POCKETS WERE CLEANED OUT BY THE KILLER! THE ONLY LEAD IS THIS TICKET FROM THE "SUNSET PAVILION"... A WATERFRONT DIME-A-DANCE PLACE! IT WAS CAUGHT IN A SEAM OF HIS COAT! NOW, GAIL, OUR ONLY CHANCE...

I KNOW, CHIEF! GAIL, THE GUMSHOE, BECOMES A TAXI DANCER, AND WALTZES AROUND FOR CLUES!



I KNEW YOU'D DO IT, GAIL! MAC HERE WILL BE AROUND IF YOU NEED HIM!

OKAY, MAC...ON TO THE "SUNSET PAVILION"! MY FEET ARE ACHING ALREADY!



UNDER MAC'S WATCHFUL EYE, GAIL JOINS THE "HOSTESSES" AT THE "SUNSET PAVILION". A FEW NIGHTS LATER...



OW! AVAST THERE, SAILOR! WATCH WHERE YOU'RE HEADED! YOU'RE STEERING ONTO MY TOES!

I'M LOOKIN' FER A BLONDE NAMED MAE! MY BUDDY HAPPY LEFT HERE WITH HER A WEEK AGO, AND I AIN'T SEEN HIM SINCE!



SENSING A LEAD, GAIL PUMPS HER PARTNER...

HARRY SOUNDS LIKE QUITE A LADIES' MAN!

OH, HE'S A SLICK ONE! BRITISHER...SMOOTH... USED TO BE A BUTLER FER SOME UPTOWN SOCIETY MUG BEFORE HE TOOK TO THE SEA!



SOCIETY MUG? SOUNDS INTERESTING! WHO WAS IT?

MAN NAMED ALBERT... SOMETHING LIKE THAT. SAY! THERE'S MAE NOW!



MAE! WANNA TALK TO YUH! WHERE'S HARRY?

I DUNNO WHAT YER TALKIN' ABOUT!

LEGGO HER, MATE!



WHERE IS HE? YUH LEFT HERE WIT' HIM!

I TOLD YUH TO LAY OFF, MATE!



INSTANTLY THE DANCE HALL IS A RAGING BEDLAM AS THE ROUGH-AND-READY CUSTOMERS EAGERLY PITCH INTO THE BRAWL! UNABLE TO KEEP AN EYE ON GAIL, MAC IS PINNED AGAINST THE WALL!

GOT YUH!

TAKE THAT!

BLIMEY!

MAE'S SNEAKING OUT THAT EXIT! I'D BETTER FOLLOW HER!

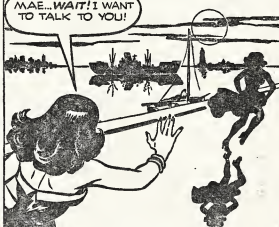


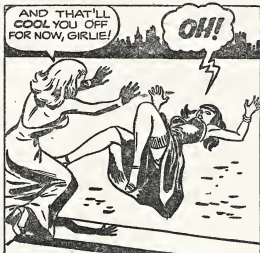
TWISTING HER WAY OUT THE DOOR, GAIL PURSUES THE FLEEING MAE...



ALONG A DESERTED WATERFRONT STREET...

MAE... WAIT! I WANT TO TALK TO YOU!





NEAR SPENCER ALBERT'S LAVISH HOME, GAIL SEES...

IT'S ALBERT!
GOING FOR A
DRIVE AT 3 A.M.!

I'LL TAKE THE CAR,
JAMES...I WON'T NEED
YOU ANYMORE TONIGHT!



AS ALBERT'S CAR PULLS AWAY FROM THE CURB, GAIL TAKES A DESPERATE CHANCE...

HOPPING CARS IS DANGEROUS...
BUT IT'S MY ONLY HOPE
OF TAILING HIM!



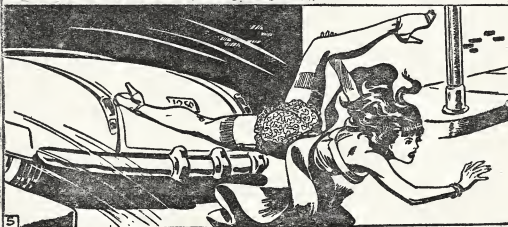
LOOKS LIKE ALBERT'S HEADED FOR
THE WATERFRONT! MAC WILL BE TRYING
TO LOCATE ME! MAYBE IF I SCATTER
THESE DANCE TICKETS THROUGH THE
STREETS, HE CAN PICKUP THE TRAIL!

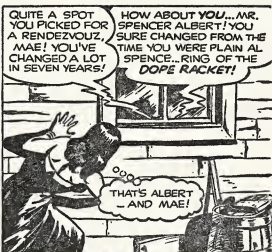


IT'S THE WATERFRONT, ALL RIGHT!
MY HUNCH PAID OFF! IF I CAN
JUST HANG ON...



BUT THE SPEEDING CAR MAKES A SUDDEN SHARP TURN AND GAIL IS THROWN CLEAR!







SILENTLY THE KILLER STALKS GAIL THROUGH THE GRIM DARKNESS, AS THE WAVES LAP QUIETLY UNDER THE PIER...



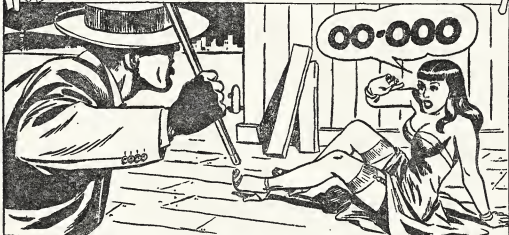
SUDDENLY THERE IS A NOISE!

OHH!
A RAT!!

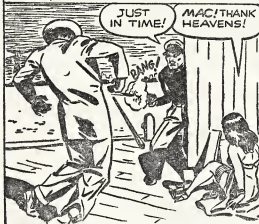
THERE YOU ARE! THANKS FOR LETTING ME KNOW!



ALBERT LEAPS AT GAIL, SWINGING HIS CANE FOR A CRUSHING BLOW...



BUT ALBERT SEEMS TO STOP IN MID-AIR, THEN TWIST AND CRUMPLE!



I COMBED THE WATERFRONT, AND FINALLY PICKED UP YOUR TRAIL OF TICKETS! WHO IS... OR WAS... THIS GUY?

A FORMER GANGSTER TURNED RESPECTABLE! I'LL TELL YOU ABOUT IT LATER, MAC! RIGHT NOW I WANT TO RELAX. THIS NIGHT LIFE IS KILLING ME... IT ALMOST DID!



LOOK FOR GAIL'S NEW CASE NEXT MONTH.

FLIRTING WITH THE CHAIR



FINLEY

I SHOULD have been happy. I should have been as happy as a sailor in a girls' dormitory; but I wasn't. Maybe it was the money in the briefcase at my side, maybe it was the dark, banked walls of the parkway hemming in the multi-laned concrete or maybe it was reaction setting in after the excitement of the

evening. There was a prickling sensation in the bridge of my nose and the hairs on my neck were bristling. I had the feeling that two eyes, fixed unblinking eyes, were fastened on my back. I had never been so uncomfortable in my life.

Twice, I looked over my shoulder, but the wet parkway was dark be-

By EDWARD WILLIAM MURPHY



Claire started running for the door as Dickerson's fingers clutched at her.

hind me. I was driving along at a forty-mile clip at two-thirty in the rain-lashed morning. There was no one near me. I was alone in the company car. Except for the roar of the tires and the rhythmic click of the windshield wipers, the night was si-

Here I was, speeding through the night with three thousand dollars of my best girl's money. But when I got out to examine a flat tire, I found I had an unexpected passenger in the rear compartment—a very dead one!

lent. Still, those eyes never left my back!

The three thousand dollars that Claire had given me were in a briefcase on the seat beside my leg. Maybe that was the reason I was nervous. I'd rather have waited until morning to deliver the money to Dickerson but Claire was insistent. She was through with him and wanted to get rid of the money they had had in a joint account. I wondered how Dickerson would take it.

My thoughts were jumping like a grasshopper's on a hot stove. I couldn't keep my mind pointed in any direction. Those eyes bored into my back, rattling me. There was a robe in the rear seat. Suddenly my mind was full of the body that my imagination pushed under that robe. Slowing down, I flipped the switch of the overhead light. The light failed to work. The rear seat was a black pool in which I could see a fragment of color—the robe. Reaching back, I pulled the robe onto the front seat. Whatever was back there was hidden by the dark. I dug out my lighter, and snapped it into flame.

The car swerved as I twisted to peer over the back of my seat. The brittle crackle of glass sounded above the hum of the tires. There was a sharp hiss of air screaming through the punctured rubber. Dropping the lighter, I clutched for the wheel. The car slewed toward the banked lawn that bordered the roadbed. I connected together a yard and a half of nasty remarks about my own nerves while fighting the wheel. That back seat was empty as a football stadium in July. There was nothing on it—nothing at all. . . .

But the prickling sensation never left the bridge of my nose—those eyes were fixed on a spot right smack between my shoulder blades!

I was alone, in the middle of nowhere, with three thousand dollars on me, and a flat tire!

PULLING up on the grass that bordered the parkway I climbed out and inspected the tire. It was flatter than week-old beer. I went around to the back of the car to get tools and the spare. The rain drummed on the roof of the car like skeleton fingers beating out a death rattle. I cursed as I fumbled with the keys, trying to find the one to open the trunk. Somewhere in the night I could hear a car coming at high speed. I finally got the key in place, and wrestled the trunk door open. At that instant the approaching car rounded a turn. Its headlights splashed over me and flooded into the trunk.

The light might have been an ice bath; I turned cold . . . cold and wet. Fear-sweat was squirting from me like a squeezed sponge.

He was curled up inside there like some monstrous cocoon. His face was turned toward the front of the car; no wonder I'd felt those eyes drilling into my back! I didn't try to see the face. I couldn't bring myself to touch that head. The back of it was a mess of hair and blood with bits of brain squirming through it like little white worms!

Something white rolled out of the trunk, striking my shoe.

A slimy, black smear of blood had coagulated on the floor of the trunk beneath that ruined head. My stomach churned, but I couldn't move. The lights grew in intensity as the approaching car hurtled toward me. My shadow grew, flooded over that curled corpse. I was pinned to the body by the bright beam of those lights. What if the driver of that car spotted the body inside the trunk? You just don't wave away a corpse with a mashed head, not at two-thirty in the morning. Slamming the door shut, I raced for the front seat . . . and stopped dead in my tracks. I remembered the thing that had rolled out of the trunk and hit my shoe. I couldn't leave anything behind; the

cops pin murders on people because of little slips like that. I ran back, and squinted under the car. The lights from the approaching car threw black shadows over the grass. I pawed around in the wet grass while my nerves squirmed like snapped piano strings. My fingers closed over a smooth cylinder. It was a cigarette!

Jumping to my feet I galloped for the driver's seat. The car was close—too close! A long banner of sound cut into my ears as it swung wide to avoid hitting me. I was getting panicky and I knew it. I had to think this out. Bodies don't just grow in trunks. They have to be put there. The trunk was empty at five o'clock that evening. I knew that because I had opened it when I put Claire's packages inside.

THE boss had a strict rule against using the company cars after hours, but what are rules when the girl you love needs help? Claire had a mountain of packages; she'd been shopping on her lunch hour. Getting those packages home through the subway would be as easy as carrying a mountain through a roller coaster. Claire and I had spent plenty of time together some time back until Dickerson came along and cut me out. The old glow was still smoldering in me, though. Every time I saw her, I'd get to feeling like the inside of an electric blanket.

I borrowed the car, without asking, naturally, and shuttled Claire and her packages to her door. On the way she let out that she and Dickerson were quits. She didn't say why and I didn't ask. I was suddenly getting rosy visions, bright luminous prospects filled my mind. I studied her cameo-perfect profile! If only she wouldn't wear that particular brand of bright orange lipstick, I thought.

"Since you were so nice, I couldn't let you go home without dinner!" She

smiled a warm invitation. "But you'll have to run to the store for a few fixings. Drop me at the house, and I'll get things started."

I dropped her, unpacked her boxes from the trunk and drove off. When I got back with the stuff she wanted, I saw she was perturbed about something, but whatever it was she refused to say.

Well, we sat and hashed it all out, and when I left her I had helium in my heels. Dickerson was out and I was back in favor.

The car had been parked in her driveway all evening. The body must have been stuck into the trunk while we were talking. There was only one thing that made that possibility look bad. Except for myself, the only person who handled the car keys was Claire! . . .

A siren wailed in the wet darkness, sending a prickle of fear up my spine. I rounded a curve and saw far ahead of me the other car had been halted in the middle of the road. A dozen cops were swarming around it, peering into the rear seat, pulling open the trunk. It was a police road block!

My ticket to a fast murder trial was crushed in the trunk. I was flirting with the chair unless I could get rid of that body before those cops flagged me down!

I slammed my foot against the brake pedal. The car swerved sickeningly on the rain-slicked concrete as I wrestled the car into a fast U-turn. A police whistle cut above the squeal of the tires. And then, flat, distant, like a book hitting a floor, I heard a shot. Something slapped through the window glass, sending sharp particles screaming about my ears.

The car wobbled on its flat tire. A siren wailed behind me. My fast turn had caught the police unawares. I was out of gunshot range, but I couldn't hope to outrun the cops on the parkway. I had to abandon the car. A copse of trees loomed darkly

ahead. I fought the steering wheel, lurched across a wide lawn and crashed through a fringe of underbrush. The car was still moving when I nabbed the briefcase and jumped! Even as I gained thin shelter, I knew I had done the wrong thing. Now I was a fugitive!

SOMEHOW, I got through the net of policemen who had set up the road block. Fear was sour in my stomach. There was no one I could tell my story to. Who'd believe it? The briefcase with the money in it flapped against my leg as I ran and I remembered Claire. I had to contact her somehow. I had to tell her the story before the newspapers came out. I found myself in one of those new real-estate developments that are mushrooming in the New York area. It seemed to be a large-scale cemetery. Nothing moved in its dark streets. After running and stumbling for two hours, I located an all-night drug store, and went inside to make my call.

There was something strained and seedy about her voice. I could tell something was wrong the first few words she spoke:

"Peter, have you delivered the money yet?"

"Look, Claire. I'm in trouble—" I broke in. "I have to speak fast."

"You haven't delivered the money," she cried. "Peter, don't you realize what this means to me." She suddenly seemed angry. "And I was depending on you—"

I caught sounds that might have been someone speaking and then the receiver went silent, as if a palm had been clamped over the mouthpiece.

The prickling sensation came back into the bridge of my nose. The phone was downstairs in the living room. It was now four-thirty in the morning. She had answered on the first ring. Therefore she must have been downstairs at that moment. When I left

she said she was going right upstairs to bed. For the first time in weeks, she added, she was going to sleep easily. . . .

Her voice came through to me again, sharp and quick. "Please, Peter, take the money right down to Allen's office. You know where it is on Nassau Street. Give it to him. Please do it immediately. I can't stand this much longer. Please!"

"Claire," I cut in, "something's happened tonight. I have to speak to you."

"I'll be at the office at nine," she cut me off sharply, "you can talk to me there. If you love me, deliver the money to Allen immediately!"

Before I could say another word the phone went dead. I dropped the sweat-greased receiver back onto its hook. I wished she had listened to my story. Then suddenly, I was glad she hadn't. What right did I have to expose her to this scandal? When it was cleared up, then I could explain. I had to go to the police and tell them what happened. But first I'd get rid of the money.

It was still pouring when I left the drug store. The sleepy-eyed druggist had told me where to catch the bus to the subway. After about fifteen dreary minutes the bus lumbered out of the darkness and stopped. There was no one aboard but the driver. He seemed glad to have someone to talk to, for immediately he began to babble.

"Rotten night, huh? You been waitin' long?" He made change slowly, talking all the while. At least his voice was friendly. I sat down near the front of the bus while he chattered on: "Little excitement down the road. That's why I'm a little late. The cops got a road block set up. They're looking for a murderer." His voice went hoarse and mysterious on the last word. I could see that he felt some kind of importance, having been stopped like that.

I dove down the stairs as the cop's gun cracked a second time.

"The cops told me this guy they're chasing brained his boss and stuffed him into the trunk of a car!"

"His boss?" Involuntarily, I spoke aloud. I couldn't keep the fear from twitching my lips.

"Yeah. His name was Maule. The cops said his head was mashed to nothing. Guess this Peter Hoyt guy just didn't like the boss, huh?" The bus driver was smiling. His big,



strong yellowish teeth gleamed as he looked over his shoulder at me.

THE cold sweat was trickling from under my armpits. Peter Hoyt he had said. That was my name: Peter Hoyt! I felt myself getting white. They'd learned my name already! Had he recognized me? I jumped to my feet but was thrown sideways as the bus made a turn.

"You get dumped?" he asked. I couldn't tell from his tone just how he meant that. I looked at his smiling face. "Maybe I should have taken it a little easier. You ain't hurt are you?" He pulled to a halt and opened the doors.

I lifted myself to my feet and felt relief untie the knots in my chest. The square lights of a city subway entrance glowed white in the rain. Without another word to him, I shot out of the bus and down the steps into the subway. I had to get away from those leering yellow teeth.

"Hey, Mister!" his voice cracked behind me. I ran faster. The rain-slicked steps were treacherous beneath my feet. A sickening feeling pulled the bottom out of my stomach. I slid and went down heavily. Pain jolted the breath out of me. Before I could move again, I heard his heavy feet pounding down the steps.

"Hey, Mister," he said as he pulled me to my feet, "you was in such a hurry to get out of the rain you forgot your briefcase!" . . .

I had plenty of time to think on the way downtown—too much as a matter of fact. I felt like a rat in one of those labyrinths. My mind probed into blind alley after blind alley. Who could have killed Doremus Maule, and why? He was an irascible old demon. Why I had even fought with him myself. The only person who seemed to get along with him was Claire, but she was the shining exception. Another thing, Mr. Maule lived in New Jersey. What was he doing out in

Long Island? Question after unanswerable question poured through my mind until I felt like the center post of a merry-go-round. One thing lay like a dull pain in my head. The police knew my name! I was positive there was nothing in the company car to identify me. I felt a little sick. . . . It was almost as if someone had given them a tip! But the only one who knew that I had taken the car for my own use that night was Claire. Suddenly, I remembered the cigarette that had rolled out of the trunk. I fished it from my pocket and looked at the cylinder. It was a king-sized *Persian*. One end of the tube was stained with saliva, as if it had been sucked on for some time, but the other end was perfect. It hadn't been lit. *Persians* are a rare and expensive brand. Claire was the only person I ever knew who smoked them! I thrust the treacherous thought deep into my mind and brought her face before me.

I GUESS I fell in love with Claire the first moment I saw her. Even wearing that orange lipstick that I disliked, she was the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen. For six months we rolled along splendidly until Allen Dickerson came along. Allen, dark, aggressive, with a line as smooth as a starched collar, promptly shoved me aside. He was announcing their engagement before I quite knew they were serious. Shortly after that he'd been fired, and I hadn't seen him since.

Almost in a fog, I noticed that we had reached West Fourth Street. A train was waiting across the platform. My mind was still half on Claire and we left the station before I realized I was on a local. I should have waited for an express if I wanted to get off at Nassau Street. It wasn't too bad, I'd only be a few blocks out of the way, but I was irritated by my mistake. A few moments

later, I knew I had never made a luckier mistake in my life!

The local train terminal is at Fulton and Church Streets; just around the corner at Broadway is one end of the Nassau Street station. As I pounded up the stairs to the street I found myself right behind the graveyard of Saint Paul's Chapel. Rounding the corner, I saw police cars lurking like big cats around the entrance to the Nassau Street station. They were waiting . . . waiting for me!

"You there, halt!" a heavy voice boomed.

I spun. A cop was heading towards me from across the street. I started to run back towards the subway stairs. "Halt, Hoyt!" he yelled. A gun crashed. The bullet screamed from the wrought iron fence around the graveyard and smashed chips from one of the headstones. I dove down the stairs as the gun cracked a second time.

Luck was riding like a scarf around my neck. A train was just pulling out of the station. Hurdling the turnstile, I galloped furiously along the platform. An instant later and I'd have missed the train—as it was, my leap was just in time. There's a sort of buffer plate between cars on the subway trains. I caught the horizontal bar and felt my arm almost tear from its socket.

Pain lightening along through my shoulder. Half-sick, I dropped the briefcase and instinctively clutched at the rusty buffer plate with my other hand.

A gun crashed behind me. The steel frame of the car rang with the impact of a bullet. Then the train was clear of the station and running in the dark. I was safe!

Safe! That was a laugh. Even now, I knew, the signal was being flashed to the next station. It wouldn't be long before the underground passage would be flooded with cops!

The train rumbled thunderously

uptown. I felt as if vinegar was squirting through my veins. I'd been trapped; the knowledge was biting into my brain like an acid-tipped drill. Only one person in the world knew that I was going downtown to Allen Dickerson's office: Claire Lawrence. The grim picture built up in my head. Claire smoked Persian cigarettes; Claire knew I had the company car; Claire had had the key to the trunk in her possession for a time; Claire knew that I was taking the parkway back to the City; and Claire knew I was headed downtown. The whole thing was a set-up from beginning to end. And I hadn't even had sense enough to look into the briefcase. For all I knew it might contain nothing but old newspapers. I felt old and tired, and just sick enough to want to chuck the whole thing. Then I gritted my teeth. If she thought I was going to go under without a fight, she was as screwy as a worm hole.

THE train began to slow down for the station. I was taking a chance on a broken neck or sudden electrocution, but I had to risk it. Holding my breath, I dropped, hit the track bed, stumbled several quick steps before my foot caught on the upraised section of a tie, and went down hard enough to send a burst of red and yellow fire crashing behind my eyeballs. The acrid bite of ozone pinched my nose. I was numbed; but my mind was clear. I wondered if I had short-circuited the third rail, but realized that if I had I'd be nothing but a sizzling cinder now. After a second, I got up. I was dizzy with shock, but forced myself to turn and retrace my way along the track downtown. Soon I found an emergency exit. I scurried up the stairs and cautiously opened the flat steel plate that formed the street cover an inch or two. My heart twisted as if an angry hand had clutched at it. Not

ten feet away a cop was standing on braced legs! . . .

The dawn was white against the Eastern horizon. It was going to be a beautiful day; already the pools of rain water were drying up. Somewhere a tenor voice was singing "Kathleen Mavourneen." A bird flung a quick trill against the lightening sky. The cheery sounds of people throwing open windows and slamming doors could be heard. Everybody in the suburb in which Claire Lawrence lived seemed happy—everybody but me, that was! I felt cold, sodden and dog-tired. I'd lain, cooped up in that emergency exit, for fifteen minutes before the cop sauntered off around a corner. Then it had been hit-and-miss with roving patrol cars for another half-hour. Now that I'd beaten my way out of two traps, the police had stopped waiting for me to drop into their hands and were actively hunting for me. I fumbled for a cigarette, and found that I had smoked my last an hour ago. Only the unsmoked Persian cigarette remained in my pockets. That was my evidence against Claire. I had no intention of smoking that!

I leaned against her doorbell and set myself to wait. Almost instantly, the door was pulled open. She was staring at me, her clear eyes wild-looking in the dawn.

"Peter, what's happened to you?" I heard her say. I noticed she was dressed just as I had left her the night before. Her face seemed white and strained. The orange lipstick, as usual she had too much on, made an unsightly gash across the lovely oval of her face. Seeing her, my heart pounded. I still loved her!

"Well, well, Peter!" a deep masculine voice called heartily. "Come in Peter!"

I pushed past Claire. My face was burning. Suddenly I was murdering-mad. The man was Allen Dickerson.

It was obvious that he had spent the night at Claire's.

"Well, how are you, lad?" Allen seemed not to notice my rage. "Still pinching pennies for old Maule?"

Claire's high heels sounded a quick tattoo on the hardwood floor. "Do you have the money, Peter?" Her voice was sharp, angry.

"Yes, the money," Dickerson sneered. "It's important that we have the money, isn't it, my dear?"

How could she act so cleverly? That note of anger, that inflection of imitation, how neatly done. Twice she had tried to frame me for a murder she had committed and now she could work that note into her voice! I felt cold all over. Cold and glacier-calm.

"Probably the police have it," I said evenly. "I lost the briefcase in the subway!"

"What?" Claire's cry was well feigned. It would have fooled me if I hadn't had this night's betrayals behind me. "You lost the money?"

"Sure, in the subway."

"Is that the trouble you said you were in? Why didn't you tell me this at that time? Oh, Peter! Now everything is ruined!"

DICKERSON smiled. His dark saturnine face seemed to glow in the shadowed living room. "Claire, it simply will not work," he said. "You really didn't think I believed what you told me. I must say you two are splendid in your parts, but as I say, it simply will not work." He chuckled and reached for a cigarette from the box on the table and thrust it into his mouth.

"You, Peter, should go on the stage. Look at you now: smut on your face and hands, your suit grease-stained and wrinkled as a potato sack with half of the potatoes still inside, your hair disheveled. Did you dress particularly for this little act?" He was moving about as he spoke so I couldn't

see his face clearly. But the sneer in his voice was unmistakable. Claire seemed to see me for the first time.

"Peter, you look awful. Did you have an accident?" The solicitude in her voice sounded as phoney as a dime store diamond.

"Yeah," I said, "an accident. A funny sort of an accident, too. A couple of stone walls reared up and knocked me down; or maybe I got clipped by a comet." I was stalling for time in which to figure a method of trapping her. I wanted something sudden and dramatic. She'd be a tough one to trap.

"You've been drinking," she accused. Her voice was filled with heartbreak that gave me a turn even though I knew it was faked. "Peter, you got drunk and lost the money."

I made my voice chill. "Sure, Claire, I got plastered on a love potion. Now I've got a swell hangover. Like all hangovers, this one makes me want to swear off the stuff." I dug into my pocket for the cigarette. I was going to throw it before her eyes and tear the cover off this little death package, when a sharp, imperative knock sounded against the front door.

Claire, white-faced, looked from me to the door and back to me again. Her bright orange-painted lips twisted as she bit the lower one. A puzzled frown marred the smooth loveliness of her brow. Man, that girl was beautiful—beautiful and evil!

Allen Dickerson was still prowling about the room as if searching for something. "I wonder who that can be?" he asked, as he peered out the window. "Police!" he exclaimed. "Claire, there's a police car at the curb!"

The police! I had to think of an angle quickly. If those boys nabbed me now, I was doomed!

Claire looked at me. I could see the horror in her gray-green eyes. "Peter, what did you do?" she cried.

"What on earth are you laughing at?"

I pulled my face back into serious lines. Suddenly I had noticed something that brought everything into focus. I remembered a lot of things that I had forgotten until now. Now I knew the sudden dramatic twist I needed to tear this job wide open.

The knock sounded again on the outer door, hollow and flat like nails being hammered into a coffin.

"You'd better open it, Claire," I said. "They've come to arrest a murderer, and they won't like to be kept waiting."

"Murderer?" she gasped. Her face was gray-white. The bright lipstick flashed by contrast. For the first time since I had known her, I was glad she wore it!

"Doremus Maule was killed outside this house last night! The police have come for the killer!"

SHE was jolted all right. I saw her sway, clutch at the table and then steady herself. Before she could speak, Dickerson's crisp voice cracked through the room. "I'll let them in. Hoyt, you've got plenty of explaining to do!"

"You've got some explaining to do yourself!" I said as he reached for the knob. "The police will want to know how those bloodstains got on your cuffs!"

Even in the semi-dark hall, I could see his face go pale. "You lie!" he snapped, but he stopped dead in his tracks. I could see from his face that he was resisting the urge to inspect the cuffs that might damn him.

"You killed Doremus Maule!" I said. "He fired you because you used the company car for your personal use against his orders. You must have been here last night when I drove up and dropped Claire." Claire nodded and I went on: "You wanted to have me fired, too, so you called

(Continued on page 118).

SO NEAR, SO DEAR, SO DEAD!

By
TALMAGE
POWELL

*His eyes full of fury,
Blackwell crashed his
fist in Mason's mouth.*



MASON was a young man; he was, however, also a sergeant of detectives, and had seen violent death often before this. But as he looked at the broken body of the beautiful girl at the foot of the stairs, he wanted to bury his face in his hands and let the sobs tear out of him. He had never dreamed that grief could be a thing like this, hard kernels in his throat, blinding his eyes, sending

his brain reeling with the crashing echoes of his thoughts until he wanted to scream and drown the thoughts in the stricken sounds of his own racked voice. This death was different. This girl was Marilyn—and she was dead—and the dead are beyond recall! This was something very close to him.

Mason's hands were in his pockets, clenched so tightly his nails bit into his palms. He took his eyes off her

She was beautiful in life—and even in death! Detective Sergeant Mason wanted, above all, to work on the case because he was sure it was murder. And he vividly remembered when they had been in love.



dead loveliness; he couldn't look at her any longer. When the call had come into the station, he'd heard her name mentioned. It had flowed over him like a horrible electric shock. Marilyn—dead. But he knew one thing. He knew this was his case. His! Sergeant of Detectives S. D. Mason's case—and if it were murder,

he would hound her killer to the front door of hell.

Beside Mason, Hawkins cleared his throat. The sound grated in the spacious, tastefully furnished house. Hawkins was a lean rookie, just promoted to plain clothes. Hawkins had never killed a man. Hawkins, figuratively, still had fuzz on his chin. But

Hawkins was likeable, and Mason didn't mind being teamed with him. He looked at Hawkins, realizing the rookie wanted him to do something.

From Hawkins, Mason looked at the brisk man who had introduced himself as Doctor Dennison. He realized that Dennison had been speaking for some seconds to Hawkins. "Of course it was an accident," Doctor Dennison was saying. "Mrs. Holcombe, the housekeeper, had set the small bundle of dirty towels from the bathroom hamper at the head of the stairs. Mrs. Blackwell started toward the stairs, doubtless glanced back, her attention drawn for a second, and her feet became tangled in the towels."

Mrs. Holcombe, heavy, stolid, gray-ing, sobbed softly. She was standing near the newel post. She might, Mason thought, be the sort of woman to leave a laundry bag where someone might trip over it. Mrs. Holcombe did not look overly bright. She was just an average domestic.

Mason raised his gaze to the stairway. Gleaming oak, the stairs rose straight to the upper hall. Here and there a towel lay, like markers of her brutal, hurtling fall to death. The laundry bag from which the towels had spilled lay half-empty on the seventh stair.

The short, pudgy man standing beside Mrs. Holcombe patted her shoulder. "You mustn't blame yourself, Mrs. Holcombe. Accidents like this happen every day."

Mason took in every line of the pudgy man's plump face, sensed every facet of the smugness of the moon-faced man wore like a cloak. This was Cicero Blackwell, her husband. Marilyn's husband. Mason felt sick, as if the bottom of his stomach had been ripped out. She couldn't have loved a man like this. It had been wrong from the beginning. She had married Blackwell in haste, to heal the wounds of her pride, on the re-

bound from an affair with a guy named Mason.

MASON'S thoughts shuttled back. To the time he had met Marilyn. Another life ago. He'd been a beat cop on traffic duty. He'd given her a ticket, and looking at her, he hadn't wanted her just to drive away. This was something different; this wasn't just a cop handing a woman a ticket. He had blurted, "Why don't you have dinner with me sometime and let me give you a lecture on the whys and wherefores of proper parking?"

"Is that a summons, Officer?" She had looked at him a moment, until red crept up to his ears. Then she had laughed and said, "It might be fun at that. Call me sometime."

But from the first, he knew it was something that couldn't be. She had too much money, and he had too much headstrong pride. It hadn't worked, and she had married Cicero Blackwell, who was practically penniless but who was so rich in ancestral background that it didn't matter.

Blackwell was looking at Mason now, and Mason wondered if she had ever told Blackwell about the young cop she'd once known. But Blackwell wasn't looking at him as a past rival—Blackwell had something else in his eyes, something cautious, something like cold flame. It sent a little hunch along Mason's spine. Blackwell's gaze dropped away.

Hawkins was still fumbling with the ball, doing the questioning, looking as if he wished to hell Mason would take over and earn his pay. The brisk doctor gestured a little with his hands as he spoke. "Yes," Dennison told Hawkins, "I live next door. I heard Mr. Blackwell shout. I grabbed my bag and ran over, but one glance showed me—that it was too late. Broken neck. I then phoned the police, of course, being aware of the proper procedure."

Mason had to turn away. Broken

neck . . . lovely broken neck. . . The words hammered through his mind. They'll put her under the earth, and the rains and snows will come, and the black nights will be a lonely shroud for her. . .

Mason moved about the wide, deep living room. It was a simple room, a kind room. It held memories of her footsteps, her voice.

Near the bookcase in the far side of the room was a telephone stand; beside the phone sat an empty box that had contained fishfood. The box weighted a grocery list. Mason looked at the fine, neat writing her living hand had put on the paper.

He turned back to the little group at the foot of the stairway, and words came from him abruptly. "You didn't move her."

"Move her?" Cicero Blackwell said. "Naturally not. I was in the basement. I thought I heard Marilyn give a muffled scream, the sound of a fall. I listened a moment, heard Mrs. Holcombe's footsteps enter the house. Mrs. Holcombe screamed. I came up from the basement, and found Marilyn lying as she is now. I saw the position of her neck, knew that if any life remained in her, moving her would be fatal. I knew I needed competent help. I shouted for Doctor Dennison."

"Who was in the house when she fell?"

"Only I," Blackwell's gaze crawled around the room to meet Mason's. Blackwell's gaze held faint contempt, as if he were thinking: You poorly-paid public servant—your trousers are unpressed and your suit is shiny at the cuffs; who are you to question me!

Mason returned the look with a sneer that caused young Hawkins to shuffle uncomfortably. Mason turned to the housekeeper. "Where were you, Mrs. Holcombe?"

The housekeeper raised her head.

"Me sir? I was in back, hanging

out part of my wash. I had been in the house just a minute before it happened."

"A minute?"

"Well, you know what I mean. Maybe four or five minutes. Back outside, I heard . . . her try to scream. I thought I was just hearing things, but after a few seconds came in the house to see, and there she was . . . on the floor like that."

"What do you mean, you heard her try to scream?"

Mrs. Holcombe said, "Well, I . . . It was like she'd felt herself falling and had just time to get the scream started."

"I see. Now let's keep all this straight. You were here in the house about five minutes before Mrs. Blackwell's death. Was she downstairs at that time?"

"Yes, sir. She said she would finish dusting the little sitting room upstairs and feed the two aquariums of tropical fish up there that Mr. Blackwell keeps in the little sitting room—it's a kind of den. I heard her walking upstairs just as I went out the back."

"It jibes on all points," Hawkins said. "She went up, started back down—and tripped."

"No," Mason said. His voice was thick, quiet—like an electric current in the room. "She made it safely back down!"

Doctor Dennison gestured one of those butterfly wavings of his hands that he used. "Preposterous!"

Mason said with that same thickness still in his voice, "She not only made it back down—she made it all the way to the telephone! Did she phone in a grocery order earlier in the day, Mrs. Holcombe?"

"Why—yes, she did!"

"And when she went upstairs as you went out the back she was going to dust the sitting room and feed the aquarium. That would certainly take all the elapsed time between your go-

ing out and your hearing the scream, wouldn't it, Mrs. Holcombe?"

"I—I suppose so, sir."

"And when she came back down the stairs," Mason said, "she had an empty fishfood box in her hand. She evidently had used the last of it to feed the aquarium, and she brought the empty to make sure she got the brand name right. She carried that empty over to the telephone, and added fish-food to her order. It must have been added later—or it would have been written in the rest of the list. With the time element what it is, I don't think she had time to go back up the stairs to do anything after she left that empty box on the phone stand—and the box being there seems to indicate that she had made her final trip down the stairs safely!"

The silence was a net, a breath of cold, a cobweb dashed over the room.

Mason let his gaze rest on her dead form once again. *Remember me? Remember the flash of my teeth when I used to laugh at the way your ears were prone to redden, Mason? Remember the afternoon in spring we climbed the hillside together—right up to the clouds, and spread a picnic lunch and you said . . .*

He felt the backs of his eyes stinging. He tore his gaze away and didn't trust himself to speak.

Hawkins' cough was loud in the silence. "But if she never went back up the stairs—it means somebody broke her neck, set it up to look like an accident. Who'd do it, I wonder?"

"Her husband," Mason said.

BLACKWELL'S lips tightened until their redness had vanished. "I'll speak to the commissioner about this! Here I am, my wife dead, and you're saying. . ."

"That she had a lot of money, a vault full of money, and you had none. You had nothing but blue blood and a taste for luxury. What if she

had decided to leave you? What if she had stayed as long as she could take you? If she divorced you, she'd take her money with her. You'd be left penniless—and your tastes couldn't take that, not the old, degrading, hateful problem of finances all over again. Murder might have been easier."

"Murder?" Blackwell's jaw muscles knotted. "I'll get you for this!"

"That may be. But if she had any ideas about divorcing you, you'd better admit it. I'll never rest until I dig into every angle of this thing, no matter how irrelevant it might seem—every angle that could occur to one human brain!"

His eyes fought Blackwell's eyes a few seconds. Their gazes met, locked, wrestled for mastery. "You're being difficult about this, Mason! Perhaps Marilyn did think of divorce now and then. But I was in the basement at the time she fell. She was alone up here. It couldn't have been murder—only an accident!"

"You can prove you were in the basement?"

"No. But I was down there in my woodworking shop," Blackwell spaced the words well apart in time, hammering them at Mason. "I was down there stripping water-proof veneer to make a latticework, but no one was with me. However, it seems to me that very fact should prove my wife's death an accident. If I had intended to murder my wife, I'd have been more carefully. . ."

"He. . ." Mrs. Holcombe said suddenly, "he really was in the basement, sawing strips for the lattice at the time Mrs. Blackwell fell. I could hear the saw going from up here before I went out with the tub of wash to hang up. The basement windows were open from the back yard, I could still hear the saw. It was going all the time I was out there, until I heard Mrs. Blackwell's scream. The saw was still going when I came in

the house, found Mrs. Blackwell, and shouted for Mr. Blackwell. He turned it off when I screamed and came running up the stairs."

"Just the sound of a saw?"

Mrs. Holcombe looked blank.

"I mean," Mason clarified, "that a saw would have to be ripping through wood to make much of a sound."

"Oh, I could hear the saw ripping right through the wood!"

"And just why did you take an interest in the sound of the saw on this particular day?"

"Why, he was making a lattice-work for me!" Mrs. Holcombe said, as if it should be obvious to anyone. "I had mentioned a lattice I wanted on my cottage. It's out on the rear of the property. Mr. Blackwell works in wood for fun, a hobby. Anybody'd listen to Mr. Blackwell saw strips for a lattice they wanted very much. I planned to have flowers. . ."

She droned on. Not just anybody would listen to the saw, Mason thought, but a Mrs. Holcombe would—and if Blackwell knew she would, knew she would maintain he'd been in the basement the whole time making her a lattice, it would be one of the finest alibis a man ever had. . .

Mason bit his lips, walked toward the basement stairs.

The basement was vast, well-lighted. Mason stood at the foot of the stairs. On across the basement was the fat furnace, stoker, coal bins. About him were the habiliments of Blackwell's shop, drill press, lathe with face plate, racks of tools, a few shavings and a mound of sawdust on the floor. The odor of paints and lacquers; jigsaw, planer, emery wheels.

A pile of wooden strips, each about an inch and a half in width, sagged their middles between two sawhorses near Mason. On the long saw bench, straddling the blade of the saw was another long strip and the wider piece of waterproof veneer

from which it had almost been severed, the strip Blackwell's saw had been cutting when Mrs. Holcombe's scream had sounded.

MASON moved about the basement, stopped. On the concrete floor beyond the saw bench lay a heavy discarded screen door spring, and a broken brick. He looked from them to the veneer on the saw, and his face whitened. He opened and closed his hands, and went back up the basement stairs.

Then he was looking at her again. *Remember me? Remember the first time you kissed me, Mason? Remember how soft the night was, how quiet? Remember how we didn't speak for a long time, there on the edge of the lake where we'd driven? We couldn't speak, we never wanted to speak again and break the spell. Remember when I was a living, breathing, pulsating Marilyn, Mason? But we let pride and money stand in our way. And now it's too late—beyond recall. . .*

Mason lifted his gaze from her, to the little group about her dead body. He must never look at her again. He couldn't open the dam; he couldn't stand the flood of memories.

"Blackwell," Mason's voice was dead, "I think I know how you managed it. It was cunning—and daring—and almost perfect. You made no direct attempt to alibi yourself. You knew Mrs. Holcombe would think you'd been in the basement and come forward and say so, which would have made the alibi a hundred times stronger. Who would question a husband admitting he was alone with his wife in the house at the time of her death, with his housekeeper alibing him?"

"But he was. . ." Mrs. Holcombe began.

"No—you only believed he was. He knew today was your wash day, that
(Continued on page 120)

Ray HALE

"A NOOSE FOR NEWS"

by Ken Battelfield

WHILE THE NEWSPAPER REPORTER OF THE 'CLARION' RAY HALE, IS PREPARING TO LEAVE THE NEWS-PAPER OFFICE FOR LUNCH A GHASTLY SCENE OCCURS IN THE SLUM AREA OF THE CITY

I'D BETTER CALL THE COPS



OUTSIDE HIS BUILDING, HALE HEARS A POLICE SIREN... HIS FRIEND, DETECTIVE SERGEANT POOLE, RIDING IN THE PATROL CAR, ORDERS THE DRIVER TO PULL OVER TO THE CURB.

WE'RE ON OUR WAY TO A HOMICIDE, HALE. WANT TO COME ALONG?

THANKS, SARGE, I SURE DO!



WHAT'S THE STORY, SERGEANT POOLE?

MRS. MORRISON, AN OLD LADY, WAS REPORTED STRANGLED IN HER BED, HALE.



THEY ARRIVE AT THE SCENE OF THE CRIME...

THE HOMICIDE SQUAD AND MEDICAL EXAMINER ARE ALREADY ON THE JOB, HALE.

THEY WORK FAST, SERGEANT POOLE.



THE COP RINGS THE DOORBELL.

OHHHH, MORE POLICE! I'M PAMELA MORRISON. IT'S MY MOTHER WHO HAS BEEN MURDERED.

SHE DOESN'T SEEM VERY UPSET!



PAMELA LEADS THE TRIO TO A BEDROOM. THE MEDICAL EXAMINER TALKS TO SERGEANT POOLE.

THAT'S THE WAY WE FOUND THE OLD LADY. HER NECK'S BROKEN. THE MEN ARE TAKING FINGER-PRINTS NOW.



SERGEANT POOLE AND REPORTER HALE GRILL PAMELA.

WILL YOU TELL WHAT HAPPENED, MISS MORRISON?

I WAS WORKING IN THE KITCHEN WHEN I HEARD SOUNDS FROM MOTHER'S ROOM. I RAN IN...AND FOUND HER... DEAD! A MAN WAS CRAWLING OUT THAT WINDOW, MR. HALE.



CAN YOU GIVE US HIS DESCRIPTION?

YES, SERGEANT... BUT I'LL NEED PROTECTION. HE SAID HE'D KILL ME IF I TALKED.

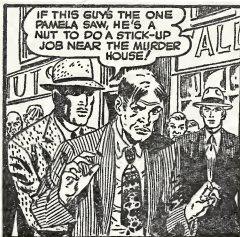
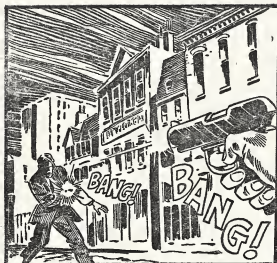


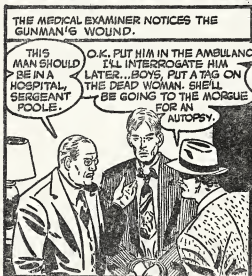
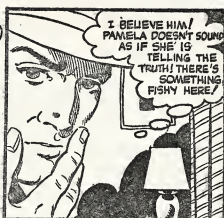
WE'LL SEE THAT YOU'RE NOT HARMED, MISS MORRISON. NOW TELL US ABOUT THE MAN.

HE WAS PART WAY OUT THE WINDOW, SO I DON'T KNOW HIS HEIGHT... HIS FACE WAS GAUNT... HIS NOW TELL US ABOUT THE MAN. LIPS WERE THICK... AND HIS NOSE WAS LARGE... HE WORE A PIN-STRIPE SUIT.

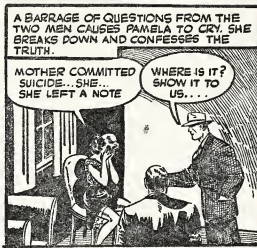


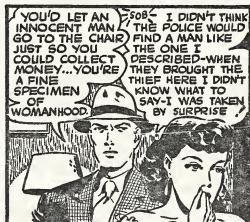
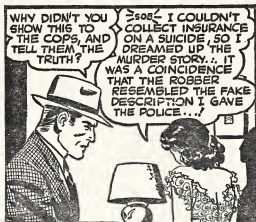
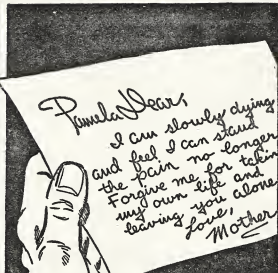












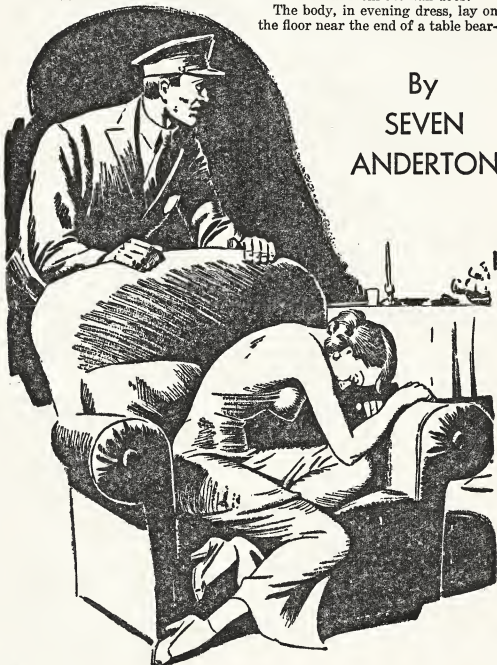
A SPOT OF DETECTING

DONALD WARFIELD was murdered just before midnight in his apartment in swank Bellwood Towers. De-

tective Captain Robert Fields arrived at the scene fifteen minutes after the fatal shot was fired. He surveyed the murder room from the hall door.

The body, in evening dress, lay on the floor near the end of a table bear-

By
SEVEN
ANDERTON

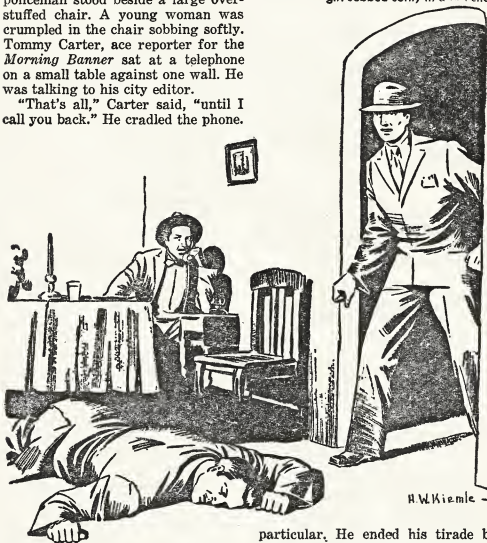


The Broadway playboy finally got married—but in addition to a luscious young bride, he got a bullet in the head as a wedding present. The cops thought they had the murderer, but it took a smart reporter to put them on the right track.

ing an untouched dinner for two. A policeman stood beside a large overstuffed chair. A young woman was crumpled in the chair sobbing softly. Tommy Carter, ace reporter for the *Morning Banner* sat at a telephone on a small table against one wall. He was talking to his city editor.

"That's all," Carter said, "until I call you back." He cradled the phone.

The body lay on the floor and a girl sobbed softly in a big chair.



H.W. Kiemle -

This was the fifth time in six weeks that Captain Fields had arrived at the scene of a crime to find Tommy Carter there before him. Fields blew up with a loud bang. In sulphurous language the sleuth expressed his low opinion of reporters in general and of Tommy Carter in

particular. He ended his tirade by ordering the reporter to get out of the apartment and stay out.

Tommy Carter didn't seem greatly impressed by the outburst. When Fields had finished, Tommy uncoiled his six feet of leanness and got up. His smooth round face was freckled. He looked like a teen-ager—especially when he grinned and until you looked

more closely at his wide blue eyes. Tommy had seen a lot of things with those eyes. Back of their twinkle was understanding of many sides of life.

"The words," Tommy grinned as he moved towards the door, "are colorful but the tune is terrible. Besides I've heard it before."

"Get out and stay out," Fields snarled.

"I'm getting," Carter drawled. "I've telephoned the main facts to the paper. If the old man wants to know why I didn't get more detail on such a big story I'll refer him to you."

The detective's wrath cooled suddenly. In his anger he had forgotten for a moment that the *Banner* and its owner, Jacob Watterman King, were potent factors in the politics of the city. Now he remembered.

"Wait a minute," Fields growled.

Tommy paused with the doorknob in his hand and the door partly open.

"Stay there by the door if you want to," Fields said, "But keep still and don't get in the way. It gets my nanny to have buttinskys mess around over a place before I get a chance to check up."

"Never touched a thing," Carter soothed. "Just looked and listened. Asked a few questions." The reporter was not looking at Fields. His eyes were studying the door which he was slowly closing.

FIELDS grunted and moved towards the body. It was evident that medical aid was useless. A bullet had entered the head just above the left ear. Blood had made a small stain on the thick rug. Donald Warfield, millionaire, clubman and man-about-town, had died instantly. Fields turned towards the girl in the big chair and the policeman who stood beside her.

"Tell me about it, Duffy," Fields snapped.

"I was standing in front of this

building, talking to Swanson, the night janitor," the officer said. "I had just pulled the box at the corner. All of a sudden we heard a woman yell. Then we heard a loud shot—almost like a shotgun. Then there was more female screams. I jumped into the lobby and Swanson followed me. There wasn't any more shots but the woman was still hollering blue murder. I scooted up the stairs and located the fuss in this apartment. Swanson was right behind me yelling for me to watch out for wet paint in the hall. He opened the door with his pass key and—"

"How long after you heard the shot until you were in sight of this apartment door?" Fields put in.

"Not more than a minute."

"See anybody in the hall?" Fields asked.

"No."

"Go on."

"When we busted into this room," Duffy went on, "There was nobody here but the stiff. This girl was locked in the bathroom having hysterics. I tried to open the door and she yelled at me. She called me Jerry and told me to go away quick or they'd catch me. I yelled back that I was police and if she didn't open the door I'd bust it down. So she opened the door and I fetched her out here. Then she told me—"

"Let her tell me," Fields interrupted.

The girl was crumpled in the chair with her face buried in her arms. Fields jabbed her shoulder with a blunt forefinger. "What happened here?" he demanded.

The girl lifted a tearstained but beautiful face. She was Vina Lee, young star of a recent musical comedy hit. The show was said to be backed by Donald Warfield's money. Since his arrival Tommy Carter had been wondering about Vina Lee's presence in Warfield's apartment.

Broadway insisted that Vina was "as straight as a string."

"What happened here?" Fields prodded.

"A—a man—shot Mr. Warfield," the girl answered huskily.

"I noticed that," Fields grunted.

"Who was the man?"

"I don't—I never saw him before," Vina Lee said. Her eyes fell. She was frightened.

"Warfield's name was Donald," Fields asked, "wasn't it?"

"Yes," the girl nodded.

"Then," Fields pressed, "why did you call this officer Jerry when he came to the bathroom door?"

"I—I don't know."

"Listen, sister," Fields growled. "You know a lot more than you are letting on. You'd better come clean. The killer's first name was Jerry—and you knew him."

"I didn't," the girl cried, "I didn't." She was on the verge of going to pieces.

"You'll tell," Fields predicted grimly. He looked at the laid table. "Were you and Warfield eating?"

VINA LEE struggled to gain control of her emotions. "We were just going to sit down," she said. "The waiter had just gone. Then he—the man—jumped up from behind that divan over there." She indicated a divan which stood across one corner of the room.

"And then what?" Fields inquired.

"The man had a gun in his hand," the girl shuddered. "He said he was going to kill Donald. I screamed. Then the man shot and Donald fell. I was so scared I didn't know what I was doing. I ran and locked myself in the bathroom."

"And what became of Jerry?" Fields asked.

"It wasn't—I didn't see where the man went, he probably came and went through that window," Tommy

Carter jerked a thumb at one of the room's two windows. Both were open and unscreened.

"I told you to keep still," Fields glared at Tommy who grinned back but didn't answer. Fields turned back to Vina Lee. "How long have you been living here with Warfield?" he asked.

Vina's cheeks flushed. Anger flashed for a moment in her tear reddened eyes. "I've never lived here," she said. "Don—Mr. Warfield and I were only married this afternoon."

Fields snorted. "Don't kid me, sister," he jeered. "Warfield wasn't the marrying kind."

"You—you—" Vina choked, "I—we were married in New Jersey this afternoon. I can show you the certificate."

"You do that," the detective scoffed.

Miss Lee sprang up and darted from the room. She was back in a moment with a stiff folded document. Tommy Carter edged to where he could read over Fields' shoulder. The paper was mute witness to the marriage of Donald Warfield and Vina Lee during the day so recently past. The reporter's eyes gleamed. This made the story still bigger. For nearly twenty years Donald Warfield had been a determined bachelor—perennial Lothario of Broadway. He had become a benedict on the day of his murder.

"So it was a good act, sister," Fields grunted. "There wasn't any Jerry. You wanted Warfield's dough but you didn't want to live with your sucker. What did you do with the gun?"

Vina's face paled and her hand flew to her throat. Her lips moved but no sound came from them.

"Nuts, Bob," Tommy Carter said. "You've been out of uniform a long time but you'll be a cop all your life. Why—"

"You shut up or get out," Fields barked.

TOMMY shrugged and moved over to the telephone. Fields glowered at him and turned back to Vina. "What did you do with the gun?" he snapped.

"I never had any gun," Vina cried. "I've told you—"

"You've told a lot of funny stories," Fields cut her off. "I want to know what you did with that gun."

"I searched the place," Officer Duffy spoke up. "I couldn't find any gun."

"You cops," Fields snorted, "couldn't find a basketball in a box of marbles."

The policeman's face turned a deeper shade of red but he said no more. Fields strode over to the open windows.

"That's authentic," Tommy Carter was saying into the telephone. "I saw the certificate. That's all for now. Fields has gone off half cocked. I'll have to do a spot of detecting."

"There's a ladder up to this window," exclaimed Fields.

"I tried to tell you that," Carter cradled the phone and went over to the window.

The window opened on a court between Bellwood Towers and the adjoining building. The top of a long ladder rested against the wall about a foot below the window sill.

"Where's that janitor you said came up here with you?" Fields snapped at Duffy.

"Out in the hall," the policeman answered. "He wanted to keep the fresh paint from getting messed up. I told him he could keep everybody out unless they had business in this room."

"Bring him," Fields ordered.

A few moments later the janitor stood beside Fields.

"How come that ladder there," the

detective demanded, "and why no screens on these windows?"

"The building is being redecorated," the janitor said. "The screens have been removed for painting. The ladder looks like one that belongs to the decorators. It wasn't there when I came to work this evening. The ladders and other stuff were piled in the alley."

"As I said before," Tommy Carter remarked, "that may be the way the killer came and went."

Fields scowled at the reporter but said nothing as the apartment door opened. The medical examiner and the men from the laboratory and fingerprint department had arrived.

Half an hour later the body of Donald Warfield was carried out and the crew from headquarters departed. Vina Lee Warfield sat dry eyed in the big chair. Fields glared at her then looked at Duffy.

"I'm taking this dame to headquarters where I can talk to her in private," Fields growled. "She either killed Warfield or she knows who did. You take a chair out in the hall and guard the door until I send somebody to relieve you."

"Am I—arrested?" Vina asked, fear in her low voice.

"Call it that if you want to," Fields snapped. "You'll stay with a matron until I do some checking and ask you some more questions. Come along. Clear out of here, everybody."

Everybody moved into the hall. Officer Duffy carried a chair, closed the door and took up his vigil.

ON THE street Tommy Carter glanced at his wrist watch and moved away in the direction of the *Banner* office. From the tail of his eye he saw Fields put the young widow in a police car and drive off. At the first corner the reporter turned and hurried down the side street to the alley. A couple of min-

utes later he was standing at the foot of the ladder which led up to the still open window of the murder apartment. He chuckled softly as he knelt and quickly removed his shoes.

Tommy was in the apartment about fifteen minutes. Then he came back down the ladder and put on his shoes. He had nearly an hour left before the *Banner's* final edition went to press. He found a cab and went to police headquarters.

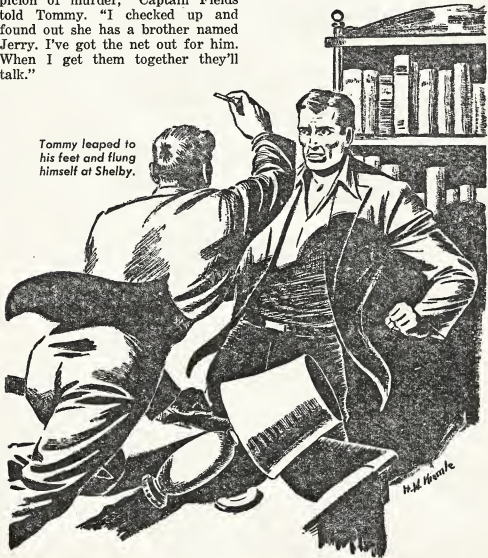
"I'm holding the dame on suspicion of murder," Captain Fields told Tommy. "I checked up and found out she has a brother named Jerry. I've got the net out for him. When I get them together they'll talk."

"Probably," the reporter nodded, "but I doubt what they say will make sense. See you some more."

In the *Banner* newsroom Tommy Carter grinned at City Editor Fred Loring who had just finished reading the story Carter had hammered out.

"It makes a good yarn for the final," Tommy said. "Newlywed millionaire playboy murdered. Unkissed bride held as suspect. But it's all blah. Fields has made a mess of it. Let him finish gumming up the works."

Tommy leaped to his feet and flung himself at Shelby.



Then I'll find the killer and the *Banner* will have an exclusive. I'll—"

Loring turned from handing Tommy's story to a copy boy. "Listen, Sherlock," he snapped, "you just keep gathering news. That's what you're paid for. Get this detective stuff out of that ivory noodle of yours or go an' try to collect your check at headquarters."

"Yeah," Tommy grinned. He was used to Loring's outbursts. "Well, the gal didn't kill Warfield and neither did the guy she thinks is guilty. I've noticed a few things and—"

"All you need to notice," the editor cut in, "is that the *Banner* overpays you for being a reporter. You can go home now."

TOMMY CARTER wasn't due at work until one o'clock in the afternoon but he rose early the next morning, dressed carefully in the haberdashery he saved for occasions and went to his favorite restaurant for breakfast. He bought a copy of the *Banner* at the cashier's counter and read his own story of the murder while he ate. Then he called a taxi and went to police headquarters.

Captain Fields wore a triumphant grin as he pushed some papers across his desk towards the reporter. "There," he said, "is the killer's confession. The afternoon papers have copies. Help yourself."

Tommy read the confession while Fields lay back in his swivel chair and gloated. According to the confession, Jerry Lee had surrendered himself to the police upon reading in the *Banner* that his sister was being held for the murder of her husband. In its essence the story was this:

Jerry Lee, twenty, and three years younger than his talented sister, had come from their little home town up state to visit Vina and witness her stage triumph. In a Broadway cafe he had overheard some ugly remarks

about his sister and the wealthy playboy who was backing her show. Jerry said nothing to Vina about Warfield. He told her he was going home. Then he rented a cheap room and prepared to do some spying. He saw Vina and Warfield together and twice followed Warfield home to Bellwood Towers, meaning to speak to him. But his courage failed. On the morning before the murder Jerry had gone to his sister's apartment meaning to have a serious talk with her. Vina was not there and Jerry learned from the superintendent that she had had some things sent to Bellwood Towers. Jerry bought a gun at a pawnshop and waited around Bellwood Towers for Vina and her betrayer to appear.

He saw the decorators at work and noted the open windows of Warfield's apartment. He waited until late when all was quiet, then got a ladder and gained entrance to the apartment. He found baggage he knew was Vina's in the bedroom. Then he hid behind the divan and waited. Warfield and Vina arrived with a taxi driver carrying baggage. Warfield went straight to the telephone and ordered cocktails at once and dinner for two served as soon as possible.

JERRY lay quiet while the taxi driver left and the cocktails arrived. Then he listened to words and demonstrations of affection that were disturbing to a brother who did not know that he was listening to a bride and groom. He was about to confront the couple when the waiter came with the dinner. Jerry waited until the waiter was dismissed and Vina and Warfield moved towards the table. Warfield made an amorous remark that set Jerry's blood boiling. He jumped up and drew his gun. In a few passionate words he told Warfield why he was doing so and shot him down.

Vina had been screaming. She kept it up as she fled to the bathroom. Jerry climbed over the divan and escaped by way of the ladder. He went to his room and spent the night thinking about how he could escape to South America or some other far-off place. In the morning he had gone out for coffee and seen the *Banner*. He then gave himself up to a policeman he met on the sidewalk.

The confession was signed and witnessed. Tommy Carter laid it on Fields' desk. "I want to talk to that kid," he said.

"He won't see you," Fields shook his head. "His sister had a hard time getting him to agree to see a lawyer."

"Where is his sister?" Tommy asked.

"She made an appointment to see Felix Darby at eleven," Fields answered. "She said she was going to her own apartment first." Darby was a leading criminal lawyer, successful—and expensive.

Tommy Carter glanced at the wall clock. Ten after ten. "I'll see you," he said as he turned towards the door.

It was a quarter past eleven when Tommy got back to Fields' office. "I got Vina Lee Warfield to postpone her date with Felix Darby," the reporter said. "Now I'm going to save her a lawyer's fee—and show you how to nab the real killer of Donald Warfield."

"I've got the killer, you lunkhead," Fields snorted.

TOMMY grinned as he shook his head. He loved to bait Fields. "You couldn't possibly make such blunders by accident," he declared. "You must work at it. That Lee kid didn't kill Warfield."

"I suppose you know more about it than he does," Fields sneered.

"I do," Tommy nodded. "You don't really want to see the kid burn for something he didn't do—or do you?"

"You're crazy," Fields snorted. "He—"

"Now, Bob," the reporter cut in. "Why get sore? You know I'm a better detective than you are—even if you never admit it. Was I crazy about the Langdon case? Was I crazy when I told you about the—"

"All right," Fields snapped, "What dizzy idea have you got now?" The detective had a grudging respect for the ability of the reporter.

"Young Lee didn't kill Warfield," Carter replied, "and if you'll come along to Warfield's apartment I'll prove it to you."

"First," Fields growled, "I want you to explain something else. Duffy was on the spot last night when the murder happened. He says he reported by phone five minutes after he got into the apartment. I drove there like a bat out of hell. But you were already there. And that's been happening right along. How come?"

"I'm a friendly sort of guy," Tommy grinned. "I do favors for people whenever I get a chance. I do my best to make friends wherever I go—and I succeed quite often. That's one reason I am a better detective than you are. You treat the public like a conglomeration of crooks. You pinch the first person handy and make everybody hate your guts. I have hundreds of friends scattered all over this burg who rush to a phone and call me the minute anything happens that might be news. One of those friends called me last night."

"Who was it?" Fields asked.

"I'm not going to have you bullying my friends," Tommy refused. "I've exposed my system. That's enough. Try building yourself one like it. Shall we go over to Bellwood Towers?"

THEY entered the Warfield apartment fifteen minutes later. "I looked this place over last night after

you left," Carter said, "but I didn't move anything."

"How'd you get in?" Fields scowled.

Tommy told him.

"Some day I'm going to jug you," Fields growled.

"That," Tommy grinned, "will be the day."

"Go into your dance," Fields snapped.

"Follow this closely," Tommy said. "I'll make a detective of you yet. Both Jerry Lee and his sister have testified that Jerry stood behind this divan when he shot at Warfield. Both say that Warfield was looking at Jerry when shot. Right."

Fields nodded.

"Then," Tommy asked, "how do you account for the fact that the bullet entered Warfield's head above the right ear?"

"Go on," Fields grunted.

"Stand at the end of that table where Warfield stood when he was shot," Tommy said. "Stand as though facing a man behind the divan."

"Well," Fields demanded after taking the position.

"Where would a bullet come from to hit you above the right ear?"

Fields looked towards the door opening into the hall.

"Correct," the reporter said, "The bullet was fired from that door. Now, suppose that the kid behind the divan was not much of a gunman. Suppose he held his weapon loosely and it jumped when he fired. The bullet went over your head or shoulder. Where would it have wound up?"

Fields faced about. "In that wall," he said, "unless it went out the window."

"Pull back the drapes of that window," Carter directed. "You'll find that a bullet went through the drapes and lodged in the wall about eight feet from the floor."

The detective strode across the

room and looked. He turned and glared at Tommy.

"How did you know that hole was there?"

"I was looking around last night for something besides somebody to pinch," Tommy chuckled. "While I was at the phone I noticed some bits of plaster on the floor directly beneath those drapes. After you shooed everybody out I investigated and found the bullet hole. I also checked on some other things. Have you matched the slug from Warfield's head with Jerry Lee's gun? I suppose you have the gun?"

"The gun was in his room," Fields said. "No hurry about the check after the kid confessed."

"I'll bet you that the fatal slug doesn't match Jerry's gun," Tommy offered. "And I'll bet you the one in the wall does."

"I'll check," Fields growled. "What else?"

"Jerry Lee shot at Warfield and missed," the reporter replied. "Somebody else shot through the door and didn't miss. The shots were fired simultaneously. Remember the report sounded almost like a shotgun to Duffy?"

"The girl would have seen anybody open that door," Fields objected.

"I'll explain that," Tommy walked to the door and Fields followed. The reporter opened the door and pointed to some marks on its edge and similar ones on the casing. "Know what made those?" he inquired.

"Powder marks," Fields said after scrutiny.

"Right," Tommy nodded. "And notice a few of the specks are on the outside of the door and casing. That proves that a gun was fired through the door last night, because the hall was painted late yesterday afternoon. Also the door was only opened an inch or two by the killer—else the

marks would not be on both door and casing. Vina Lee, watching her brother threaten her husband with a gun, wouldn't notice so slight an opening of the door."

FIELDS was unable to keep admiration entirely out of the look he gave the reporter.

"Now," Tommy said, "stand out here in the hall and hold the door open just wide enough to aim your gun through the crack at a man standing where Warfield stood last night."

The detective took the position, squinting along his gun barrel at the imaginative human target.

"Now don't move," the reporter cautioned, "but notice some things. First, the door is ajar only a couple of inches yet you have a good view of a man standing where Warfield stood. Second, you could not see a man standing behind the divan. Third, your left shoulder and side is pressed against the wall in order that you can get your gun into position. Now look at the wall."

Fields looked.

"The wall paint was soft last night," Tommy said. "If anybody had pressed against it last night, the mark would be there. There is no mark."

Field looked puzzled.

"Take your gun in your left hand," Tommy grinned, "and try aiming at the same spot."

"Hell's bells!" Fields grunted when he had made the experiment.

"Exactly," the reporter chuckled. "A left handed man could have opened the door with his right hand and fired the shot without coming in contact with the wet paint. But being left handed is not the only peculiarity we can trace to the killer."

"No?" Fields inquired.

"Take your place again," Tommy said, "and level your gun as before."

Fields obeyed.

"Now don't move your gun," Tommy said. "You are tall—six feet—but those powder marks are several inches above the muzzle of your gun. Which proves that the southpaw killer is several inches taller than you."

"Well," Fields snorted. "Go ahead and tell me his name."

"It won't be hard to find him," the reporter said. "But unless you agree to keep the story sewed up tight until the afternoon papers have all gone to bed I'm not going to hurry about pointing him out."

"It's your story," Fields muttered.

"And the credit won't hurt you any," Tommy chuckled. "You dig that bullet out of the wall and trot back to your playhouse. Have the bullets checked. I'm going to the *Banner*. I'll see you some more."

IT WAS half past one when Tommy Carter reached the *Banner* news-room.

"Where in hell have you been?" Fred Loring demanded. "I want you to get over to the horse show and—"

"Too busy," Tommy grinned at the city editor. "I'm going to nab the Warfield killer in time that you can get out an extra and make monkeys of the afternoon finals."

"So you're still drunk," Loring barked. "The killer has surrendered and confessed. Go home and sleep it off. Come in sober tomorrow or I'll tie a can to you."

"You can't scare me," Tommy declared. "You can't get out even a second rate sheet like this without at least one good reporter. Be ready to get out that extra—or don't say I didn't warn you."

"You rattle-brained pest," Loring snorted. "If you've got something, give. Are you trying to tell me that the Lee kid didn't kill Warfield?"

"I am telling you," Tommy nodded. "Jerry Lee thinks he is a murderer,

but he's just a punk marksman. A guy can't be executed for that. After a research chore in the morgue your reporter is going to lead the cops to the real killer. I'll be back with the news beat of the year." He moved away towards the *Banner's* reference room.

"Or you'll be hunting a job," Loring flung after him.

"That," Tommy tossed back, "is what I was doing when I found this one."

Tommy Clark entered Captain Fields' office about an hour later. He carried an envelope filled with clippings taken from the *Banner's* files.

"Check the Warfield slug with the one they dug out of Lou Stratton's body," the reporter advised.

Lou Stratton was a young hockey star who had been shot down a year before at the mouth of an alley near his hotel. The murder was still unsolved.

FIELDS' mouth fell open. "I was going to spring that on you," he said. "We found that in the routine check. The slugs matched."

"I thought so," Tommy nodded. "Does the name, Karl Boehm mean anything to you?"

"Ex-con," Fields grunted. "What about him?"

"I've dug him out of the *Banner* files," Tommy replied. "Got the lead from Vina Lee by asking a few obvious questions. Then I checked up. Boehm was chauffeur for Monterville Shelby when Shelby's wife was killed by a fall down the stairway in Shelby's home. Boehm was questioned at the time, but the death was declared accidental. Shelby was in Washington when it happened."

"What's all that got to do with this kill?" Fields inquired.

"Karl Boehm was the waiter who served the dinner in Warfield's apartment last night," Tommy replied.

"He has been working at Bellwood Towers only two weeks. He is very tall. One will get you ten that he is left handed."

Fields stiffened with interest. "Where does Boehm fit into the Stratton murder?" he asked.

"He doesn't yet," Tommy said, "but Monterville Shelby does. Young Stratton beat Shelby up in a night club row over a girl. Shelby is a chaser. Stratton was gunned down a week after the brawl. Shelby had flown to Paris the day before the shooting."

Fields frowned and rubbed his nose. He hated to admit that Tommy was right.

"Now," Tommy went on, "Shelby had the inside track and was giving Vina Lee a hell of a rush when Donald Warfield got into the act about six months ago. Shelby didn't give up easy—but he lost out. Two days ago he went to Chicago on business. I telephoned his social secretary. He is flying back today. Can you put the picture together?"

Fields got to his feet. "This could be something," he said. "Monterville Shelby is big stuff. He's got dough and drag. Let's go and get Boehm. I suppose you know where he is?"

"He lives at the Monitor Hotel," Tommy nodded. "He works nights so he should still be in his room. But keep your shirt on. If you don't get Boehm with the gun you'll have nothing to hold him on."

"If he kept the gun after the Stratton kill," Fields argued, "he'll have it now."

"Maybe," Tommy said. "But a good detective always has two strings for his bow. Have you?"

Fields' face reddened. He glared at the reporter.

"I have," Tommy said, "and—"

"Tell me about it on the way to the Monitor," Fields snapped. "Come on."

TOMMY CARTER sighed. "You'll never be a detective," he declared. "Monterville Shelby's plane is due at the airport in thirty minutes. Send somebody to keep track of him. You may want him in a hurry. And you'll need enough help to do a good job of searching for Boehm's gun—and fast."

Fields picked up his desk phone.

Half an hour later Fields and three other detectives led Karl Boehm from the Monitor Hotel and put him into a police car at the curb. The tall waiter was about forty-five. He was the blond Teutonic type with hard pale-blue eyes. His phlegmatic expression wore a sneer.

"You're burning your fingers, copper," Boehm sneered. I never owned a gun. And I can prove I was in the kitchen last night when Warfield was killed. You can't—"

"Shut up," Fields snapped. "Take him to the precinct and book him for investigation. Nobody sees him until I say so."

The car drove off with Boehm and the other detectives. Fields stalked to his own official car. Tommy Carter followed. Fields got onto the two way radio.

"Monterville Shelby," the voice from headquarters reported, "left the airport ten minutes ago in a taxi. He gave the driver his home address. Dickson and Tanner are tailing."

Fields started the car. "Remember," Tommy Carter said, "Play it like I told you. Even if we miss the gun, we can still nail our birds."

"Or I'll be pounding a beat," Fields growled. "Shelby has drag. I let you work me into the damndest corners. I don't—"

"Shelby," Tommy cut in, "has hired a killer to do away with at least three people who annoyed him. There will be more. Pin him down and there will be kudos for your brilliant work. When have I steered you wrong?"

Fields' answer to that was a grunt. The big car rolled on.

Monterville Shelby, heir to wealth of generations, lived in an old red stone mansion on Riverside Drive. Officers Dickson and Tanner were in their car at the curb when Fields drove up.

"He's been here fifteen minutes," Tanner reported.

Telling the men to follow, Fields led the way to the Shelby mansion.

"Hit him hard and follow through," Tommy Carter coached at Fields' side. "Don't let on that you want to know a single thing."

"Okay, master mind," Fields muttered. "But this had better work."

A butler opened the door. Fields flashed his badge and pushed the servant into the hall. "Take us to Monterville Shelby," he ordered, "Fast."

MONTERVILLE SHELBY rose from a leather easy chair beside a long table in a book-lined library as the group entered. Shelby was a slender man with hair graying at the temples. There was arrogance about him. He looked the aristocrat despite traces of dissipation. He was wearing a maroon smoking jacket over a soft white shirt. His trousers were freshly pressed.

"What is this," Shelby demanded in a cool crisp voice as he dropped a cigarette stub into a tray on the table.

Fields identified himself.

"And what is it you want?" Shelby's brows lifted.

"You," Fields told him. "We got Karl Boehm a couple of hours ago. He tried to shoot his way out—with the same gun that killed Donald Warfield and Lou Stratton."

"Indeed," Shelby said. "So?"

"So he decided not to take the rap alone," Fields said. "He told us about

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STICK CLOSE TO MURDER

By MICHAEL THORPE

AFTERWARD I was damned glad about the watch being stopped, for there was a clock in both places, and that was all that saved me. Mike Raskob, the

biggest promoter in the Southwest, leaned back in his chair and grinned around his cigar, shaking his head at me. He said, "Pop, for a guy that's been handling fighters as long as you



A good second always sticks to a fighter in the ring. Harrington knew that, and he kept close to Pop. He knew that Pop was nosing around, and would lead him to the evidence that would break the case.

have, you leave a lot up to Eddie. Why go ask him? Hell, you get his fights and let him do the fighting!"

Here's what had happened. Mike Raskob had just offered us a match with Kid Montez, who was next to the champ. If Eddie Maloney, my boy, could get by the Kid, he was sure of a shot at the champ. Most managers would have simply signed on the dotted line and told their

fighter whom he was to fight. But Eddie and I never did business that way! He was too close to being a son to me, that kid.

Mike waved at the phone. "He's working at Fillman's Gym, ain't he? There in front of you is Mr. Bell's biggest success, ring him up."

So I had to shake my head and grin back at him. "I got it fixed there so he can't get no phone calls a-tall," I explained. That was because the boy was too popular. With both sexes, if you see what I mean. And now the



Wales would have beaten Harrington to the draw if I hadn't slugged him first.

watch came in. I looked at it and the damned thing had stopped. I pointed at Mike's big electric and said, "It's twenty past two. I'll walk down to Fillman's and ring you back from there by a quarter of three."

"I got to leave here at three," he grumbled, "but if that's the best you can do, okay." Mike is wise. He cocked his head and said, "When's him and Sue going to get hooked up? Tell him to hold off until after he beats the Kid, for I think he'll do it."

"They're waiting until Christmas," I told him. "The boy wants to go ahead, but Sue has got the house full of sewing and all them whatnots a woman likes to have on hand before she takes the big jump." So I raised my hand in good-bye and went out and got in the elevator, thinking how much this fight with Kid Montez would mean to Eddie Maloney—and Sue.

Sue's my daughter, Sue Compton, and her and Eddie has been engaged about three or four months. This fight would mean the dough they needed to set up housekeeping right, which Sue insisted on. "Do it right," she always said, "and I can hold Eddie down." For if the truth must be known, good-looking Eddie Maloney had been pretty much of a skirt-chaser—in spite of my raving and ranting—until Sue came back from school and he decided she was the only skirt he ever wanted to chase for the rest of his life.

OKAY. What happens when I leave Raskob's office but I run into the sports editor of one of our biggest papers, and he wants a lot of information. A fight manager has to treat the sports writers okedoke or it's too bad. By the time I'd got away, I was scared I'd be too late to see Eddie and still call Mike Raskob back to nail the fight down. I was plumb out of breath when I got to the gym, which is on the second floor,

and the first thing I did was point to the clock and ask Al Murphy, the darky that works for me, if that clock was right. It read five minutes until three.

He said it was—sort of shifty-eyed—and started to hurry away. One quick glimpse showed me Eddie wasn't in one of the rings; he wasn't pulling weights, working a bag, or using the rope. The shower, I thought, and hurried after Al Murphy who was going in that direction.

He heard my footsteps, Al did, and turned around. That boy was gray instead of black, and his eyes was rolling. He said, "Now, lookit, Pop, don't you go getting sore. That Eddie is hard to handle, and I couldn't hold him. I didn't even know where he was going till afterwards, and I find the wire where he dropped it on the floor."

"You mean Eddie walked out on his training when I told him to wait? Was he sick? Where'd he go?" By now I had Al by the front of his sweater and was shaking him. He was trying to get something out of his pocket all the time, and I finally calmed down enough to glimpse the yellow of a wire. I grabbed it.

It said: "EDDIE HELP ME FOR OLD TIMES SAKE AM IN TERRIBLE TROUBLE CAN'T REACH YOU BY PHONE BUT COME MINUTE THIS RECEIVED. BRENDA."

I got a lot of black Irish in me, a helluva bad temper. I yelled, "You louse, you, letting him walk out on you to see her! You know what she done to him, you know why we're so damned broke today! And you let him run over there as soon as she snaps her fingers!"

I was a pretty damn' good lightweight in my day. He went over three rows of chairs, taking them all with him. Then Fillman and about a dozen other punchy bums come trotting up to see what's the trouble, and Fillman shifts his cigar and said,

"Let's do all the fighting in the ring, Pop!" Which burned me further, so I grabbed him by the vest.

And I yelled at him, "Why'n't you stop Eddie walking out of here? What kind of gym do you run? Then somebody tapped my arm and pulled me around, and it was Joe Wales, who does a bit of bodyguarding for Fillman.

"Hold it, Pop," he said, and those cold, killer's eyes of his looked into mine while he tapped his left armpit.

I jerked away. Al was limping toward the dressing room and I went after him. "Sorry, Al," I told him. "You know why. What time did this babe's wire come? What time did Eddie leave?"

"'Bout twenty after two, maybe a little later. Look, Pop, sir, I couldn't stop him and—well, iffen I'd known the wire was from her, I'd have stopped him with a water bottle. You know that. But I don't find the wire until after he push me away and go on!"

ALL the way across town in the cab I kept thinking about what Al said about using a water bottle to keep Eddie from seeing this Brenda Sloan. There's a certain type of dame, whether you know it or not, that gets a big kiek out of hanging around fighters and wrestlers. This Brenda Sloan was like that. Only where a lot of the others are pretty harmless, she was poison, pure and simple and unadulterated. Look, a fighter is a healthy animal, he's plenty human. A nightclub every once in a while, movies, all that stuff with a nice harmless dame is good for him.

But Brenda Sloan was one of them slinky glamour dames. The two of them never went out an awful lot together—they stayed at her hotel apartment in the Aztec. She was saving the going out for later on, after she got Eddie pinned down right.

Glamour, yeah, but hard as nails and twice as tough to bend inside. And fighters were her meat and gravy. She was married to Babe Sloan right after he won the heavyweight title, and you know where he ended. Yeah, the gutter. I could name you a dozen young fighters she ruined.

As for her and Eddie—the only argument we ever had in four years was about her. He wanted to be engaged to her. And for an engagement present—not a wedding present, mind you—he wanted to give her a piece of his contract. If my daughter, Sue, hadn't come home from school I don't know what might have happened.

Sue got Eddie pretty well straightened out. And I paid the Sloan babe ten grand to lay off us! That's the kind of gal she was. She'd have sued him up one side and down the other for breach of promise, murder, mayhem, and anything else a shyster could have thought of. And after taking my ten grand, not more than five or six months ago, here she was sending Eddie Maloney wires to get him to her! I tell you I was boiling!

The cab dropped me in front of the Aztec Inn, one of the biggest and swankiest in our town. I tossed a buck toward the driver and went through the doors. I went to the desk and asked a clerk what room or suite the babe had, but he never had a chance to answer. For one of the elevators clanged open and Eddie Maloney walked out.

A COUPLE of years ago in a ten-round go with Sailor Harvey he looked just like he looked now. His eyes was about to pop out of his head; they had a glazed sort of look, like he'd just been clouted on the chin, and his face was as dead white as a new bandage. I stepped out. He didn't even see me! He didn't even feel the hand I laid on his arm. He was damned near to the door before

I could knock him into a chair and slow him down, and he was panting like a steam engine.

He almost hit me. Then he said, "Pop! Pop!" in a choked sort of voice, not like it was my nickname, but like a little boy in trouble saying hello to his dad in a choked up sort of thankful way. "We've got to get out of here," he tremolo-ed, like he was on the verge of hysterics. And he grabbed me by the arm and had me in a cab before I could protest. He leaned over and said to the driver, "The airport, and hurry it up!" And to me, "Pop, how much dough you got on you?"

"Take it easy, take it easy!" I said. I tell you that kid was scared to death. I told the driver to take the park instead of the airport and then I sweated off seven pounds in the next few minutes.

"Dead, Pop, dead! Stretched out there on the bed with her head beat right off her! I got to scram, Pop; I got to get out of town! You see that, don't you?"

He kept sucking at the knuckles of his right hand, like a big kid about to break down and bawl. I had an awful, a terrible thought right then! I reached up and jerked the hand out of his mouth. The first two knuckles were swollen and there was an inch-long cut behind them, not deep, you understand, but like your hand looks when you've hit somebody in the mouth, and got a fist full of teeth for your trouble.

Careful like, I laid his fist in his lap and he sat there staring at it, getting whiter and whiter. Finally I managed to say, "Look, Eddie, we been together a long time. It don't make no difference, son, what's happened, we'll stick together."

"No, no," he sobbed. "I didn't do it, Pop! You got to believe me! The wire came and I took it in the dressing room to read it, so the darky wouldn't see what it was! I couldn't

make up my mind what to do, Pop. Only she said she was in trouble and for old time's sake—"

"I saw the wire," I put in, shaking as much as he was shaking.

"—and hell, all worked up like that I forgot I'd pulled off my bandages, and I took a swing at a locker door. Believe me, Pop, you got to! You got to!"

I was thinking about something else by then, however! That wire! I'd wadded it up and thrown it on the floor. I tell you I got that cab to a drug store quick, and in less time than the telling I had Al Murphy on the phone.

He said, "I'll go look, Pop. I recall you knocked me over them seats; then you throwed something at me. Maybe that was the wire. You hold the line."

HE WAS gone all of five minutes, and me biting off all my nails one by one! "No, suh, it ain't there. I looked there and in the dressing room, and all over like you tell me, but I don't find no wire. You sure you ain't got it yet in your pockets?" I was sure of that, but I went through them once more—with no result. "You want I should ask around, Pop?"

"My God, no!" You see, like a dummy, already I was figuring that maybe we was lucky enough that no one saw Eddie go in or out of the Aztec Inn. "Don't ever mention it to anyone! You understand, Al?"

"But I already did mention it," he wailed. "I didn't know where at to catch you. You hit me and rushed out 'fore I could tell you a little while ago! I figger if Eddie was going to that woman's house, somebody in the family ought to know so I called Miss Sue!"

I breathed a sigh of relief. At least an outsider wasn't going to know where Eddie had gone. But I didn't feel so hot when I called home



Harrington pulled back the covering. I felt sick as I looked. What was left of Brenda Sloan was pretty bad.

and couldn't get an answer. Sue was out, where I didn't know.

Back in the cab I shook Eddie into some sort of human shape. "Eddie, who knows you went into the Aztec Inn? Who'd you speak to?"

"I had to ask the clerk her suite number. And the house dick, I didn't know his name, spoke to me. We got to get out of here, Pop."

So I leaned forward, sick at heart and said to the driver, "The Aztec Inn, cabbie."

Eddie clutched me by the arm, his eyes wide with fright. "No, son, I don't think you beat her to death. But running ain't going to help. I'm only hoping we can convince the rest of them you didn't do it. Take it, baby, that's all we can do."

IT SEEMED to me everybody in the lobby looked at us oddly as we went through, that's how tense I was.

For in a big joint like the Aztec Inn, when it's politically fixed right, murder can happen in Room 812 and even the guests next door won't know anything about it. Brenda Sloan had Penthouse D, the classiest thing in a classy joint. And when we'd known her, she'd been taking pick-ups and the ten grand we'd paid must have looked like a million to her. The elevator took us to the top floor, where we caught an automatic elevator serving Penthouse D privately. And as soon as the door slid open, there was the cops. That section of the roof looked like it was swarming with them. The eyes of the uniformed man at the elevator door got as big around as his mouth.

"My God," he said, "they're looking for you all over town and you walk right in on us! Come in, gents, walk right into the parlor."

Harrington is a good cop, and so

is Wise, but murder is murder. The hotel clerk said Eddie had asked for her suite number. The hotel clerk remembered how he had looked when he came downstairs, white, ghastly—just like a killer, after a job. They kept me in the parlor while they questioned Eddie in the bedroom, and the poor kid looked even worse when they brought him out—handcuffed.

He sat down and buried his face in his hands. Harrington said, "Now you, Pop." But Wise stayed with the kid.

It was pretty bad. Brenda Sloan—or what was left of her—was on the bed. I told you how pretty she'd been? Part of her was still pretty. The gauzy underthings looked like they'd been painted on her by somebody like Poppy.

Harrington threw back the big towel that covered her face. Both jaws were broken. Her red lips were smeared with either rouge or blood, and her front teeth were chipped and broken. Even her nose was smashed all over to one side; there was a cut over her left eye and another one farther up on her forehead.

The room was a shambles. The vanity had been glass covered—sort of a heavy blue glass—and this glass had a big busted place in it, a place covered with blood. "Whoever did it," said Harrington, recovering her battered face, "knocked her against the vanity there and cracked her skull."

"Whoever did it?" I said elatedly. In spite of bad appearances they weren't ready yet to pin it on Eddie Maloney.

Harrington caught on. "Where were you about a quarter of three, Pop?" he asked.

"Me?"

He nodded. "Look, cops get around, we find out things and store them away for future use sometimes. This poor girl took you and Eddie over the humps for ten grand

a few months ago. We know she sent him a wire today, and that he dressed and came running. Maybe you knew about that wire, or suspected. Wouldn't it be logical for you to come tell her to lay off, and get in an argument with her?"

"I wouldn't kill her," I protested. And I thought of Mike Raskob. I said, "Look at my watch, you see it's stopped! I left Mike Raskob's office at twenty after two! Ask him. I ran into Jones, the sporting editor, and couldn't get away from him until about ten of three. I hit Fillman's about five minutes later."

He nodded, muttered, "The twenty after two lets you out. This hotel being clear across town. What were you seeing Mike about, Pop?"

"He wanted me to sign Eddie with Kid Montez. I told him I'd have to see Eddie first, that we had that kind of agreement. How did you find out about the wire, Harrington?"

"It was phoned from this penthouse. We checked her phone calls. And one of the boys went to the gym to pick you up. Fillman himself had it, you'd thrown it at Al Murphy. Why'd you hit the darky?" And when I didn't answer he shrugged it off. "He'll be here in a few minutes anyway. Okay, Pop, outside."

THE darky was already there. He told them the same story he'd told me—that because he didn't know where I was he'd called Sue and told her where Eddie was going. Harrington gave a uniformed copper my alibi and said, "Check Pop and check what Murphy is saying." Harrington is a great one for details.

Wise said to Eddie, "Look, baby, we all know what happened. Why do you fight us like this? We even know what kind she was—with no disrespect for the dead intended. She tried to bleed you for some more, didn't she, and you just lost your head. Tell the truth! Look at your

knuckles, look how you rushed out of here. You had plenty of motive; you had the opportunity; and you took it, didn't you?"

Then they pulled it. And it was Harrington who did the getting tough. He started gentle-like, saying, "Eddie we found the dent in the locker door where you slammed a fist against it. That accounts for the cut on your hand." And now it came like the crack of a whip. "You came up here purposely to kill her, Eddie! Why, damn your dirty soul, who do you think you're fooling?"

Eddie looked down at his manacles. He said dully, "She was dead when I came in!"

"She had one other visitor today, Eddie, just a little while before you came. A woman, not yet identified. But a woman wouldn't use a murder weapon like the one used on Brenda Sloan. Look at it, damn you, look at it. You came up here to kill her!"

We all looked. You all know what chest weights are? Pulley-like contrivances mounted on the walls in gyms? A fighter stands with his back to them, and takes a wooden grip or stirrup in each hand. He starts shadow boxing slow, and little lead weights down on the floor at his heels slide up and down the wall as his arms straighten out, for they are attached to the ropes and the grips. Back and forth he'll go, adding one of those half pound lead weights every three minutes to each rope, moving his feet, building arm muscle and shoulder muscle.

That was what Harrington had in his hand, one of those weights that can be added individually to the chest and arm building contrivance. "The weight," he growled, "came from Fillman's Gym! And here's a towel from Fillman's. See the name across it, you murderer! You took the towel and you took the weight, and you made a big sap out of it and beat her to death! Come on! Admit it!"

"No," said Eddie, his eyes wondering. "I brought the towel. I washed the blood off my cut hand at the gym and dried it on the towel. There's the stains, see them. I walked all the way here, trying to collect my thoughts. I'm telling you the truth. The whole truth. I rang the bell here, and there was no answer. She'd said she was in trouble and I thought maybe she was sick, so I opened the door. I yelled for her.

"And when she didn't answer I had a hunch something was wrong. I was sweating, bad, and I reached in my pocket and the towel was there instead of a handkerchief. I had it in my hand when I walked in the bedroom, I tell you, and I must have dropped it! You got to believe me! But I didn't bring no weight, no weight at all!"

It sounded screwy, and maybe I was the only one in the room that believed it. A copper whispered something to Harrington. He snapped, "Okay, bring her in now."

YEAH, it was Sue. And she'd heard Eddie's story from the foyer. She walked over to me and said, "Pop, I never asked you to do much for me, did I?"

Hell, she looked like her mom standing there, so little and sweet and pretty. I choked all up and shook my head. *For I'd suspected how the weight got there!*

"Then do something for me now," she went on. "Answer my questions truthfully. A few weeks ago what was it I asked you to bring me? To hold my papers on my desk?"

There wasn't any use. Sue's got an idea she'll make a novelist some day, and she'd always had a bunch of loose papers covering a big desk.

"Paperweights," I said, but I couldn't look at her.

"What did you bring me, Pop?"

"Two chest weights," I admitted miserably.

She turned to Harrington. "So you see that's how this one got here. You'll find the other on my table at home."

"Let me get this right," he said after a minute. "Murphy admitted calling you, which is why I sent for you. You live only two blocks from here, don't you, Pop?" And again I had to nod yes.

Wise, the soft soaper, took it up. "Miss Compton, you mean that the darky called you and you hurried right over to beat Eddie here? And you brought one of these weights with you?"

"Yes. I don't know why. She was cheap and wicked and I didn't have a gun! I—"

Eddie began laughing. He laughed like he was about to pass out. He said, finally, "Thanks, baby, but the towel whips me. Come on, you guys, I killed her, just the way she deserved. Isn't that enough? I brought a weight and a towel, and after she kept riding me for more dough, I sluggered her. You know the rest. Let's ride, men!"

"Oh, no," said Sue. "Officer, I asked her to leave Eddie alone; I told her what we meant to each other. And she laughed at me, ordered me out. I took the weight out of my purse and hit her with it. It knocked her down and—" It was horrible. She went over and over it, hysterically, and Eddie kept yelling, "Let's ride! I did it! Don't believe her!" But nobody was paying any attention to Eddie.

After a while Harrington said, "And all these blows, Miss Compton, were on the top of the head? And you held the weight in your hand all the time?"

"Yes! Yes! That was it! That—" And she saw she'd made her mistake.

For Harrington answered gently, "Sorry, miss. It was a good try for the sake of a rotten guy. You see you'd bruise your hand badly that

way. And Miss Sloan was pretty well broken up in the face, with one blow on the top of the head where she fell against a vanity. And the weight, strange as it may seem to you, didn't have a fingerprint on it."

SURE, they took him, took Eddie. What else could they do? He'd admitted it, the hard head. He'd admitted it because he thought poor Sue killed her, thought she'd really killed Brenda, being too damn' dumb to figure about bruised fingers and fingerprints, and the fact that she hadn't seen the corpse.

She tried to change her story, poor kid, but there wasn't any use. I took her home and had to call a nurse and a doctor. After she got a sedative, when she was right on the verge of sleep, she told me the truth. She had taken the weight to the penthouse. She'd seen Brenda for a few moments, and Brenda had put her out. She'd lost the weight there! It was as screwy as Eddie's story concerning the towel! And just as true!

She went to sleep and I went to town—in a big way. They let me see Eddie for a few minutes, after pulling a lot of strings. I even got him a lawyer, though it didn't do any good. They wouldn't admit him to bond, naturally. And I went out of there tearing what hair I got left. I was only sure of two or three things. Eddie hadn't killed Brenda. Sue hadn't killed her. And me, Pop Compton, I hadn't killed her. Outside of that I was pretty well lost.

I made every bar as I came to it, and only the good Lord knows how much liquor I absorbed. Somewhere in the whole thing there was a joker; somewhere something was wrong. Time passed, like time always does, and I couldn't lay my finger on it at all.

But everywhere I went, to everyone I saw that was in the know, I asked one question. I'd get them talk-

ing about the killing—for it was in the papers by then, and I'd finally lead around to asking if Brenda Sloan had been in lately. And the answer was always the same—until I got farther uptown.

In the Crystal Bar I ran into part of my answer. Sitting in a back booth, drunk as a boiled owl was Kid Montez. Remember, the monkey I was to sign up Eddie Maloney with when all this started. In the first place it was odd to see him drunk. I slipped into the booth across from him and said, "Howya, baby? Fall off the wagon?"

Montez grinned. "Fell off and bounced. But I ain't losing a thing. Doc says it'll take two months for this to heal." He laid a bandaged left hand up on the table. I prodded it with my fingers and felt the cast beneath it. Casually I said, "When did it happen, Kid?"

"Three days ago, in Chi. So eat, drink and be merry, hanh, Pop?"

FOR about twenty minutes we did the second and the third, the drinking and being merry. Kid Montez was getting more confidential and more affectionate every minute. If he'd heard of Eddie's trouble, it hadn't penetrated his befuddled brain.

He moved over beside me, saying, "Pop, you're sitting by the next middleweight champ of the world! Yes, sir, you are!"

I jabbed him playfully in the ribs and said, "Nuts, Kid. How about my boy, Eddie Maloney?"

He tried to wink. "Damn' good boy. Tell you the truth, I don't know could I take him! But I ain't never going to have to meet him now! Soon as my hand heals I get a shot at the champ!" Again that shaky wink. "Fillman's got my contract, now, and you know how he sits with Mike Raskob, the promoter!" He put two bulky fingers together to show

how Fillman and Mike Raskob sat. Then he laid his head on the table and began to snore.

I went up the street to the next bar and tried to figure it all out. Why should Mike Raskob try to sign Eddie and Kid Montez when he knew Montez had a busted hand? The fight racket has some queer angles, but that was the oddest one I'd ever bucked. For Raskob wanted the fight just five weeks from now—and Montez said his hand wouldn't heal for two months, which was screwy some place. The news about Fillman and Raskob wasn't news to me. I'd known, just as everyone else in town had known, that Fillman himself was a sort of front for the fight promoter. Was there something screwy here? Was this what I was looking for? Hell, fights mean a lot of money, but you don't frame a man into a murder rap to get him out of your own fighter's path! There wasn't much to do but see Raskob and ask him to his face? Not that it made a hell of a lot of difference either way.

I kept right on, bar to bar, and it was in the Brass Rail I noticed Harrington. When I made the next bar, he made it too. When coincidentally we were in the third one I braced him. I said, "Pinch me, copper."

"What for, Pop?"

"Hell, anything you can think of; you're tailing me! Why?"

"Maybe you'll lead me to something; you're a pretty smart old guy. Have a drink?"

We had one together. "I saw you at the Crystal," he said into his Scotch. "Thought you said Mike Raskob wanted to sign Kid Montez and Eddie. What do you want to lie for, Pop? Montez won't fight for three or four months."

I pushed my drink back and told him to keep his damned whiskey, that I hadn't lied. "Furthermore," I

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THE STRANGE CORPSE

AT THE outskirts of Redding, three miles from the vaulted granite entrance of the prison, stood a peculiar one-story house. Its walls were massive,

coffee-colored oak beams, not painted but varnished. The windows were slots, horizontal and narrow. When the house was erected, Indians were still rampaging; Elmer Dohty, em-



The warden deserved killing, but Max wouldn't have wished him killed in this particularly gruesome way. A number of ex-convicts had something on him, and any one of them could have engineered the murder.

By PHILIP FISHER

ployment director at the prison, had the advantages of the place fully in mind when he bought it. No human being could squeeze through one of those windows at night and kill him in his bed. His imagination hadn't gone maverick; he had been threat-

ened by tough outgoing convicts more times than he could remember.

In the early night the house lay like an animal huddled belly to the ground. In the main room, the oldest part of the house, the darkness was



Partridge came out, clawing at his neck, and then crashed to the floor—dead!

abruptly severed as the kitchen door opened. The kitchen was as neat as a window display, with nothing out of place. There was a metal table, and on it waited a plate of cold-cuts arranged as precisely as a subject for a photograph. Two inches north-east of the plate was a glass of milk protected by an oilsilk cover against flies. Two inches northwest—a plate of bread already buttered. Lord Dohty's nightly snack. Mrs. Dohty snapped off the bright light and turned one on in the living room.

This light was soft, and it made young Blanche Dohty look still younger than her twenty-three years. She was a highly photogenic girl, tall and firmly made, and in her present costume her excellence of form would have caused collisions at street intersections. She wore checked shorts of sheer wool, anklets and low-heeled sandals that strapped on, and an abbreviated sweater that left the midriff bare. The sweater was sleeveless.

Strapped to her wrist was a watch cased in white metal, either platinum or stainless steel. Glancing at it, she wore an expression of mild annoyance, impatience.

It was a dandy watch, a rounded square in shape, thin, with a movement practically unobtainable any more. It was a present from Dohty on her birthday, a couple of weeks before they were married. She smiled. At that time she had been a waitress in the Colonial Bar and Grill, where Dohty did his drinking and occasional dining.

Fingering the watch, she checked the time to be nine thirty-five, within seconds of being exact.

A few inaudible ticks of her watch brought her to a box of cigarettes on a table. Her daily routine was timed. Every occurrence of the day, however slight, took up so many minutes; certain things were done at certain times, had to be finished

within set limits; time was of the essence. Before he had taken the prison job, Dohty had been a watch-maker, which was how he got that way. She despised his punctuality.

He didn't mind if it took her forty minutes to do her nails, but she had to do them in forty minutes every time. But she found comedy in her strange husband, and smiled.

Looking at her watch again, she moved to the front door, which was really at the side of the house in relation to the paved highway below. It would take her four minutes to smoke the cigarette, because once he had asked her and she had timed herself and dutifully reported it.

At the doorway she blew smoke at the beetles and moths who were banging their heads against the copper screening.

IN THE prison, Dohty crossed the cavernous, empty visiting room and was admitted to the squirrel-cage by the night guard. That gate was locked and the outer one opened and closed in its turn. An elevator was the only exit to the ground level. After getting his motorcycle from the garage he waited for Max Tobin, a guard or screw who was going to follow him home tonight. They and five others were the only ones who did not live in the officers' dormitory or special quarters in the prison the year around.

Dohty had a lined, horse-face, and a mousetrap mouth. His eyes were light blue and bright, and most inmates thought he was insane or at least a sadist. He was hated or feared or both by everyone, including officers, with the exception of the warden, who was ill from five assorted diseases and hadn't set foot in the prison in a year, and his bright, cocky young assistant, George Bayma, who would eventually succeed him. At work, Dohty was undeniably ruthless and cruel.

Up came Tobin, who had been visiting the invalid in the Warden's Mansion a hundred yards away.

Not long out of the University, Tobin asked in nice English, "Of whom are you afraid, Elmer?"

"You're late," Dohty answered in a bluejay voice which resulted from a goiter operation. "I'm not afraid of anyone, but I don't want to get shot. If I do get shot, I don't want any time lost catching the gunman."

Both carried Army automatics openly, in holsters at the hip, though of course they were forbidden any weapon except heavy canes while on duty in the prison.

"Have you Davis in mind?" Max asked curiously.

"Davis, Partridge, and Wilder," said Dohty in his rusty voice. The three were bad men, in order a highwayman and two-time loser, a bank robber, and a double-murderer who had gotten off easy with a rap for manslaughter. All three, Wilder the latest, had pocketed the State's ten bucks and hit the bricks within the last month.

Any of the three had reason to harbor a grudge against Dohty. It was a hobby of his to subject the minds of murderers to such a strain that they cracked and went over the blue wall—to the insane asylum—never to return to society. The other two, Partridge and Davis, had a thing in common: Their jobs had netted them very hunky sums of cash; only a small fraction of the loot, the amounts carried on their persons, was recovered when they were caught. They spun a similar yarn of squandering the missing money, and shrugged at bona fide offers of bargaining for commuted sentences. Their crimes were serious, yet both had just received full pardons long before their minimum sentences had been served.

It would be an understatement to say that Dohty was instru-

mental in obtaining their release. At his recommendation they were *sprung*. For one thing, he was in constant touch with the men, and with the Board of Pardons his word carried more weight than the warden's.

To put it briefly, Dohty would nearly always spring a man if it was made well worth his while. He played his cards close to the vest and lived frugally, but he had accumulated, on a three thousand a year salary, a sum of cash that was nothing short of scandalous. One of these days, when he got around to it, he intended to type off his letter of resignation; he'd stick around a while for appearances, then spend the rest of his life traveling with his beautiful new wife.

He grinned at Max, thinking of Blanche, knowing perfectly well that she had married him for the money which he carefully hinted he had. She'd be fooled. He was going to live a long time, and the best years of her loveliness would be his.

"Something funny?" Max asked.

"You," said Dohty. "A man with a college education, drawing a screw's pay. You won't stick it out."

"Maybe I won't," the young fellow admitted.

"How are things in the North House?"

That was the section of the prison where all three convicts had celled, and where Max's last duty of the day before lights-out was walking the galleries to take count.

"Quiet," he said.

Still smiling, Dohty turned his back; he straddled his bike, came down and kicked the motor into life at the first try. Without a glance behind he started off.

His lips were snapped shut, thin and leathery, and his cruel blue eyes were narrowed with wondering: *What's this Maxwell Tobin, this dirty-word private detective, doing*

in a screw's uniform in the Redding prison? If they're laying a trap for me down in the city. . . . I'd kill that squirt like a sitting bird if I thought he had anything on me.

CHAPTER II

No Head on His Shoulders

IT WAS a fact that Max was a private investigator. He was up the river at Redding on this job because he had been brilliant in his studies and in a couple of cases that required brains; and because he looked no more like a detective than a capable young attendant in a filling station does.

His height was better than average, and his body was rightly shaped and sinewy. He looked good but lazy, good-natured, and a trifle sluggish in his reactions, which was how he wanted to look. Harmless.

And as he tailed after Dohty he was thinking: *Elmer Dohty is as crooked and slippery as a greased snake. If he was sure I had anything on him he'd shoot me right through the gizzard, if he knew I was a private dick.*

Below was the concrete state highway. Dohty was taking the old Redding Road home. This was a winding dirt road which wasn't even oiled any more. It followed the high ground above the prison, joining the new route just outside town.

The night was pitch black. There was a slight, erratic breeze astir, keeping shapes of mist in movement. On the right of the road the woods were continuous. On the left were a few trees but mostly the ground was under cultivation.

Though the road was untended it was still fast, and Max murmured some corrosive words when Dohty reached and passed sixty miles an hour. The reason for the profanity was that Max was traveling without

lights, according to Dohty's instructions. Of course, he knew this road and its flourishes, and besides he had the shivering beam of Dohty's powerful headlight to follow. Just the same, he let the motorcycle draw away, intending to snap his own lights on when Dohty shot around the turn ahead.

Dohty whipped through the turn, straightened up and kept peering vigilantly ahead for such crudities as boulders, timbers, or a rope stretched across his way. His eyes were as sharp as they looked, and he wouldn't be outsmarted by amateurs. And it would be a lucky shot that picked him off when he was rocketing along like this.

A murderer with imagination could have committed the act, and without wasting a jiffy made his getaway, treasuring a souvenir which would repeat his revenge over and over again. With a loaded camera and a flashgun he could have obtained an unusual picture. This shot would have depicted Elmer Dohty on his motorcycle, skimming full tilt down the middle of the road, headless. Blood would still be no more than dark tongues licking up from his shirt collar. His noggin, with his tweed cap still on tight, would not yet have reached the ground. The camera would have caught it as it hit the rack behind him; it would be cocked rakishly, the mad, narrow bright eyes defying anyone to find anything unusual about a man's planting his head there when he went cycling.

Dohty's head caromed off the rack. Then like a melon it bounded and bowled along the road at sixty miles an hour, lost some speed going through a patch of Canada thistle, and hurtled into the woods still progressing like everything.

The motorcycle kept right on going with the dead man riding, until the might of the wind plucked him

from the saddle, so long that the perpetrator of the crime thought that somehow the scheme had come unstuck.

AT THE point on the road where Dohty may have been confounded for a split second at seeing with his own eyes that there was no head on his shoulders, there was a hurried stir in the woods. The figure groped.

There was a strong metallic click, followed by an alarmed curse as Max took the bend at a safe forty-five with his lights on in twin white blasts.

The murdering shape got scarce, bent on headlong flight into the woods, with noise of no consequence.

Dohty reclined and finally fell off

The motorcycle kept on going until the dead man fell off.



his bike backward. His neck would have been broken if his head were still on. From here on till he sprawled to rest he took the landscape in wonderful leaps, flopping bonelessly when he was off the ground, as ungainly and nostalgic as a giant frog caught up in a cyclone.

Max's lights picked up the motorcycle, and he smiled at a freak of the ground-hugging mist which made Dohty's bike appear to be rushing along riderless.

Then the bike went crazy. With a jerk of the front wheel it turned, scooped out a shallow of sand and pebbles, and somersaulted the ditch. On the weedy turf outside the farmer's fence the machine tore around in circles, flopped over from one side to the other, acting violently like a powerful living thing that has been wounded fatally and is trying to get up. It died when it quarreled with the barbed-wire fence.

Max's tires left the marks of a long skid, and when he stopped it didn't take long for him to decide that Dohty wasn't anywhere around. With the car in reverse he backed up slowly, keeping his eyes skinned.

Dohty was spreadeagled and mostly in the ditch. The detective hurriedly left the car and bent to turn Dohty over on his back. The crawling mists sought to cling to him coolly, wandering against him with a corpse's unpleasantness. His chest filled with a sudden, involuntary breath, and gooseflesh spread over his body like a cold, membrane-thin skin of metal. It wasn't that he was a sissy; it was a strangeness about the night, the unexpected, and death in a form novel to him.

He closed his mouth, swallowed and straightened up.

Vacuously he muttered, "His head must be lying around here somewhere."

But he didn't stop to look. Back in the car, he took a bottle from the

dash compartment and downed a generous slug of whiskey. He bolted another big swallow that nearly made him gag, and then started for Redding.

The idea of murder, or even of a moronic and brutal practical joke, did not occur to him. It was gruesome, but Dohty was hardly the first case of decapitation in a motor vehicle accident.

Nevertheless his native curiosity kept functioning, and while he drove he wondered just what in the mischief *did* behead Dohty. Something sharp-edged, to be sure, because the surgery was neat. If it had been a car-wreck, a broken windshield could have been responsible, but there was no glass on the motorcycle. Well, he could have toppled from the machine with a heart attack. His head could have struck something on the ground. . . . Anyhow, it was lopped off, and probably the explanation would be very simple.

Max shrugged; suddenly he applied his brakes, turned right into a lane, and let momentum roll the machine downhill; he brought it to a stop near the garage, shut the door and strode across the lawn toward Dohty's house. There was a phone here, and the news had to be broken to her by someone. Blanche.

A rectangle of vague light located the open front door. On the screen moths moved their wings in blurs like diminutive puffs of talc. There was no porch, only a single short oak beam serving as a step. Slowly Max dropped his hand from the bell which he had so nearly pressed, and stared with outright fascination which made him forget all about his errand. Lips forming the words soundlessly, he thought with devout approval, "Creeping Josie! . . ."

THERE were flagstoned walks, but he had cut across the lawn and Blanche hadn't heard him arrive.

Probably there wasn't much for her to do in her spare time but keep her figure, and she was keeping it now. If Max had pushed the doorbell and caused the performance to end he wouldn't have been human. He was within his masculine rights.

Not a dozen feet from him was Blanche Dohty, standing motionless. That would have been an ordinary position, except that she was standing on her hands, her slim, straight body effortlessly balanced.

Casually she flipped over to her feet and straightened up out of a crouch. The exercise was harder than he thought, because she was breathing rather fast. She acted on sudden decisions, and turned on a heel to go wash in the kitchen. She was out of sight very briefly, and returned before Max made up his mind to ring the bell.

She paced to the table where she took a cigarette from a box. With each step she rose on the balls of her feet, as though missing the accustomed high heels. Every step was a vision of grace.

Such a peacherino of a girl belonged to old Dohty, who was no more attractive to a girl than an envelope of bony crowbait. Money, money, money. The crooked old devil had taken her off the market with as much romance involved as a farmer painting a barn. But after only a few weeks of marriage to the brutal old rooster, the wheel of fortune spun and stopped at her number. For Dohty had smoked his last fine Havana segar.

Against the wall was a black walnut chest with a long cushion on top so that it could be used as a seat. Blanche sat there smoking, and noticed his shadow on the wall.

"Ow!" she cried suddenly, and was on her feet in a hurry. The cigarette in her hand had burned her, and she snatched it up from the floor where it had dropped.

IN THE gloom outside the doorway, Max cleared his throat.

Sarcastically she said, "How long have you been standing out there, Dohty? Your plate is on the kitchen table." Even when she sneered, she was lovely, and Max guessed the pair hadn't been lovebirds during their brief marriage. "Well, stop gawking and come in!" she exclaimed.

"It's me," he said; "Max Tobin."

"Oh!" she cried. She unhooked the screen door, and Max stepped inside.

A little smile lingered on her lips. She looked down, then raised her eyes to his steadily as though looking into his thoughts.

"I'd like to use your phone," he said.

"Certainly. It's over there on the table."

He knew where it was, having been here several times before.

"Sorry I surprised you like that," he apologized.

"Oh, that's all right," she assured him. She could make her voice as caressing as the stroke of her hand.

But the humor departed from her mouth. She said, "Something is wrong."

He nodded, feeling as detached about Dohty as though he had merely read of some utter stranger's death in a paper. "Your husband had an accident."

"He's badly hurt," she hazarded. Then after a pause the expression on his face made her say slowly, "He's dead."

"Yes," he admitted, watching her intently.

Her bearing was still. It was as though she were shaking her head in disbelief.

He received the impression that she wasn't looking at him at all. While he was at the phone dialing, he watched her turn like an automaton and enter the kitchen. There, turning on the light, she poured Dohty's glass of milk into the sink.

The bread and butter, along with the plate of cold-cuts, went into the garbage receptacle; the cover clapped shut.

CHAPTER III

Dark Attack

HE GUESSED wrong about what she was doing in the bedroom with the door shut, while he was at the phone. He heard her stirring around as though aimless with shock, whether she had felt the slightest fondness for Dohty or not.

When she came out he saw that she had merely been dressing. She had donned slacks and a dark green gabardine shirt. She still wore her sandals.

Max finished phoning.

"Are you going back to him?" she asked. He said that he was, and she announced, "I'm going with you."

"You'd better not; it's pretty bad," he argued. He wasn't cold-blooded enough to tell her how bad.

Her answer was to go out and sit in his car. Shrugging, he slid under the wheel. Before they started she swore. "Damn!"

"What?"

The crystal of her watch was broken, probably against the wall when she burned herself with the cigarette. Picking out the remaining fragments of glass which stuck in the frame, she had pricked her finger. A dark ruby of blood grew to two-carat size on her fingertip while she balanced it, staring. She offered it to Max. Rather askance, he tweaked the sliver of glass out and discarded it, and blotted her finger with a handkerchief.

He was short with her. Her husband was dead, just, and she was concerned with a pricked finger. Violent death was as abstract and unimportant as part of a week-old dream. Come to think of it, he was

rather matter-of-fact himself, but he wasn't married to Dohty.

"It's still going," she said. She had the watch to her ear.

They traveled along through the blackness on the Old Road, stopped, and smoked a cigarette each before the ambulance came. With it arrived a sedan containing two detectives and the coroner. Max flagged the ambulance to a stop.

Two internes swung out and Max led them to the body.

"Cripes, what happened to him?" one asked. "Where's his beezee?"

"Go easy," Max cautioned. "His wife's in the car."

The coroner took a look and with the detectives heard Max's brief account.

"His wife identify him?" a dick asked.

"Turn him over, boys," the coroner ordered. He pointed to a scar on Dohty's throat. In the voice of an educated man he said, "That's the old horse thief himself. I took that goiter out; that's my stitching."

"Where's the motorcycle?"

Max pointed with his flashlight. "Back there, 'way back near the fence. See it?"

The man grunted. "Damned thing must have kept batting right along."

THEY tracked down to the motorcycle, and the coroner, Murphy, gave it the examination which he had not given Dohty. The only blood on it was smeared on the rack behind. Murphy lit a cigar which he had screwed neatly into a holder, and smoked pensively.

"What happened to him, doc?" a city dick asked.

His words muffled with inhaled smoke, Murphy said, "Obviously his head was cut off. You were right behind him, Tobin?"

"Right behind him. I think he was slightly stir-dippy, because he'd shuffle the routes he took home at



Suddenly, she catapulted her body and struck him with her full weight.

night, or have one of us tag along behind the way I did tonight."

"I know about that," said Murphy.

"Vengeance doesn't stay with the average man very long when the reason for it is gone, either in time or distance. He would be careful for a few days after dangerous men were released, then feel safe. But what did you see if you saw it happen?"

"I *don't* know whether I saw it

happen. There were sheets of mist like this, and I just saw the motorcycle plow off the road and churn up the weeds right here. He'd fallen off already."

"So. Not that it matters, I'm curious to know just how his neck was severed."

"Apparently he was no friend of yours."

"I don't like religious fanatics of that stripe."

"Religious!"

"Oh, yes. If he was unscrupulous himself, it didn't follow in his system

of logic that he forfeited the right to make life hell for murderers, highwaymen, oh, even townspeople whose version of the Ten Commandments he didn't like. A pity both his legs weren't cut off inclusively at the hip, so that he could tell us how it happened, at least."

"Very inconsiderate of him," Max agreed.

"There are two alternatives," Murphy ruminated. "First, of course, it didn't happen. Second, a Chinese high executioner in a breechclout was standing at the roadside and when Dohty went by he took one hell of a slice with a ten foot sword."

"Or else," Max suggested, "it was the Mad Butcher from the circus, who can halve an apple with a cleaver at twenty paces. Or possibly it was a sheet of glass flying edge-wise, out of a cyclone in Iowa."

"Don't forget the big circular saw in Bernier's mill," said Murphy. "It flew off once and went screaming for seven-eighths of a mile; cut down a rock elm that Ed Taggerty didn't know he had on the place, and gave him a wonderful haul of lengths for ax helms and whiffletrees. Bernier had to do all his milling free to get his blade back. At any rate, let's look for the headsman."

THE others were searching for the head, the body having been popped into the ambulance. They hunted along the roadside, beyond the fence and in the woods. Max and Murphy prowled the road. They hiked a long way toward the curve where Max had turned on his lights and slowed, but didn't find anything.

"Once I seriously considered killing Dohty myself," Murphy confessed. "My wife was involved."

"Give me a good murder," Max requested. "How wouldn't you get caught?"

"Dohty's house was nearly burglar-proof," Murphy related. "The win-

dows are slots and hardly pass squirrels. The place is wired with buttons in strategic places, so that he can ring an alarm in town. If the wiring is cut he has a siren to frighten off trespassers. The house is such a fortress that it would be difficult even to burn it down. But it is secluded from both the Old and New Roads by his own woods.

"There is a rathole in the northeast corner of the house and it enters his bedroom through the baseboard. A patch of wire mesh covers the hole, of course.

"When he goes to bed he locks all doors, compartmenting the house, you see. Some night when he had been drinking I would have permitted him to go home and lock up and douse the glims. In one hour his sleep would be deepest. Then I would roll into his yard with my car, and I would run a length of garden hose from my exhaust pipe into the rathole, crowd packing around the hose there, then simply wait in the car with the motor running. It wouldn't take long.

"When I left I would drive slowly to the highway, so that the sand-weighted gunnysacks attached to my back fenders would obliterate the characteristic marks of my tires in dragging."

"Jeepers," Max murmured. "We seem to be close to the possibility of murder here. Is that what you're going to report?"

"Why, no," Murphy informed him laconically. "I find no evidence of anything but accidental death with a rather spectacular twist, unless you can produce the Lord High Executioner in the breechclout."

One reason being, thought Max, that you didn't like that wicked snide for bitter apples. He had it coming and you'd as soon see justice not done this time. You as much as declared that this is murder. Thanks, pal.

The head hadn't been found and wasn't found that night.

"Merely a cockeyed accident, boys," Murphy told them. "Call it a night and run me back to town."

"How about the motorbike?" One detective asked Two.

Two asked, "What about it?"

"We leave it here? Nothing ain't wrong with it as far as I can see. Just scratches. Some bum ambles through here, and he wouldn't do anything but hop right onto her."

"Load her into the ambulance."

The internes said nothing stirring.

"You ever ride one?" Two asked.

"Nope," One admitted.

"Me neither."

Blanche was standing near. She said, "I'll ride it if someone will stand it up for me."

One murmured, "Any old time, lady."

THEY lifted the heavy machine and wheeled it back to the road. Blanche rolled up the legs of her slacks and mounted the saddle. The motor made a racket, and this smoothed swiftly to silence as she faded down the road with her hair flying.

Detective Two remarked, as he took his car, "I can't figure out dames for their nerve."

"What do you mean?"

"I dunno. She was married to the dead guy; she looked right at him with his bean gone, and what does she do but amble home with the motorcycle that killed him? I bet my old lady would be hollering and fainting all over the road."

"The gals are different from what they used to be," said One. "Anyhow, this Blanche Gerard was just a babe till Dohty married her a little while back. She was a babe working in Billy Gibbon's Colonial, and guys dated her. What she'll do right now is lock up the motorcycle and then maybe get sick on the grass at the most. Then, while she's gobbling down Dohty's best whiskey she'll go

through his stuff and find out how much money he left her."

In the back seat Murphy lit a cigar and nodded. He smiled and shrugged with indifference as the car got under way.

MAX, left all alone on the road, hadn't heard the conversation, but his conclusions were approximately the same. He had seen the effects of shock before. Blanche was getting along on nerve, and she had gone home to faint in privacy.

The detective drove along the road in the direction of the prison, around the curve where he had lost Dohty. Here he headed his car around again and began an exhaustive search.

In his headlights moved the idle phantoms of mist. He crept the car along; it was here that his headlights had picked up the riderless motorcycle, and he stopped the car. Now he proceeded on foot with a flashlight, paying the roadside and the road the closest scrutiny.

It didn't look like anything at first. It was only because he paused to light a cigarette that his eyes were raised to the proper level.

Then he thought he heard stealthy movement in the woods and cut off his torch to listen. In the pitch darkness and stillness he did hear plainly sounds in slow rhythm. He imagined them to be footsteps stealing away, and he held his breath at the thought of the eyes of the one who had murdered Dohty. He stabbed the light in the direction of the escaping footsteps, and all but ejaculated at sight of a seven-foot bull snake, as thick as his forearm, which was running like a rivulet of inky-brown water after a tawny rabbit.

The cottontail had already been shagged to a frazzle by some farmer's dog, and with each slow hop its hind legs trembled. Max left the snake to its feast and turned the light back to the tree where he had stopped.

The tree was girdled with doubled-up newspapers, which were secured with a wire. After a glance he looked at the ground. It was hard and there were no footprints, but the grass was bent down obviously trampled by the person who had rigged the tree. Max got as far as that when splinters of light struck into his eyes; he was enveloped in a bright haze and heard the meaty *chunk* of the stone bouncing off the back of his skull. Or rather his head bounced away from the stone. His knees buckled and he knelt, but didn't pass out. The pitcher missed him with the second stone and only hit the tree. Instinctively Max pulled his gun and fired, socking five spaced shots fanwise into the darkness.

His torch had rolled away, and he had hurriedly retreated out of the fringe of its light. Now he circled wide into the woods, trying to get the murderer between himself and the path of the flashbeam. While he listened he silently reloaded his gun. The man who threw those stones had a whip, and Max didn't want to get in the way of any more pitches.

So there had been someone, not just the snake and bunny. Also, the murderer wasn't armed, or Max would be a dead pigeon right now. Also, the killer had fled. Max searched the ground and found nothing but the bull snake with the rabbit's head and long ears poking idiotically out of the juicy jaws. Likely the man had been scared off by the roar of the five reports; the farmers might rouse and investigate, and all of them near the prison kept high-powered rifles handy.

Max was puzzled by the stone-throwing business. What was the object? To knock him out, then kill him with his own gun? What for? What had he found here, or might he find?

The man-trap was a simple rig. It consisted of a strand of braided

wire stretched taut across the road between twin trees, at the height of Dohty's gozzle. It had been stretched almighty tight, because Max couldn't bring the severed ends together. It appeared to be common picture wire and was painted black. The ends were bright and cut even, not frayed. So it hadn't broken with Dohty's hurtling weight; it had been severed afterward, immediately afterward, with nippers. The murderer had stuck around to see that his trap worked.

Also, the rig was wired in such a way that it probably was strung only a few minutes before Dohty was due to race by, to snare him and nobody else. A piece of wire was made fast around one tree, and the short end of this wire was fashioned into a noose. The free end of the wire running to the other tree was then passed through the noose just before Dohty's arrival, and hauled bow-string-tight and twisted fast. Enter Dohty. Exit Dohty. The killer then clipped the wire. Why?

So that it wouldn't twang across Max's windshield and give the show away at once.

The death was planned to look like a grotesque accident. The wadded newspapers prevented the wire from marking the bark of the trees. Whether Dohty was finished off or had to be terminated by a few cracks over the skull afterward, the killer remained to remove the evidence.

Here was an ingenious killer who had thought of ways of killing—which would be demonstrated later startlingly—just as quick and sure as a gun, knife, poison. Fingerprints couldn't be taken from a piece of wire, nor off that pair of rough stones which had been heaved at him. He had taken quite a wallop on the skull from one rock. The skin was broken, but the bleeding was an ooze which soon stopped.

When the wire was snipped, it had whipped back across the road into

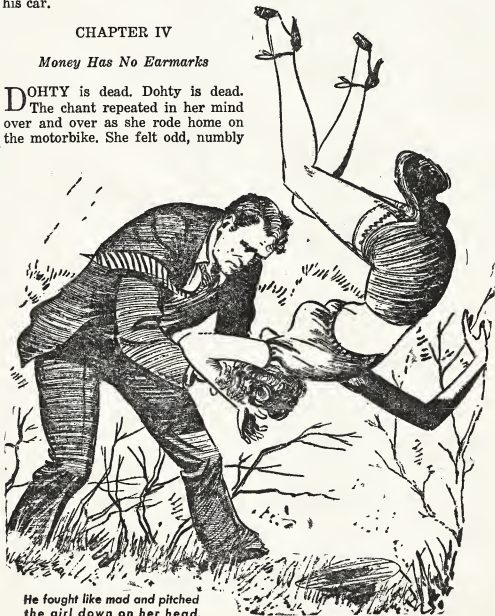
the weeds. A piece in the middle of it had been wet with Dohty's blood and had picked up a crust of dust. Max worried off a length of the wire with the file-blade of his pocket knife, and tucked the specimen into his wallet. He frowned, uncertain whether he was doing this wrong or had forgotten something. With decision he turned and hiked down the road to his car.

CHAPTER IV

Money Has No Earmarks

DOHTY is dead. Dohty is dead. The chant repeated in her mind over and over as she rode home on the motorbike. She felt odd, numbly

adream. A discarded friend told her once that she was about as lovely as a bluejay bolting fresh, warm robins' eggs. The bluejay reminded her of Dohty's raw, squawking voice, the unintentional snarl in it. No more of his tireless lecturing on the theme of a place for everything and everything in its place. She had smelled the limburger he loved for the last time. The



He fought like mad and pitched the girl down on her head.

stare of his almost colorless eyes wouldn't give her the jitters any more. And she wouldn't have to suffer the pawing of his bony hands nor his leathery kisses, which he distributed with prodigality that made her flesh crawl. The old horrible rooster. He was considerably more than she had imagined in her bargain with him, the lecherous zombie, but she wasn't particularly glad that he was dead. Nor particularly sorry. It was very interesting, but otherwise didn't concern her "from nuttin'."

She put the motorbike into the garage and emerged from the smell in there into the open night air. The air was thick and moist with the layers of mist and warm; it was as oppressive as though the sky had been crowded down to a ceiling just overhead. She walked down the slope of the grass and thought, "It belongs to me. It's mine."

"It" included everything. She wasn't triumphant nor wicked, but anxious, grim, as though prepared to defend something with her life.

Dohty. What a funny name. Dohty's lost his noodle. When she stepped through the doorway the ringing of the phone startled her. Picking up the handpiece she said softly, "Yes?"

"I hear somebody croaked," a man said conversationally.

"I beg your pardon?" she said briskly.

The man used a sarcastic tone and enunciated distinctly. "A bird told me. A crow with its tongue slit," he said. "This is Ned Partridge speaking. You may have heard of me; I was charged with robbing a bank and was sentenced to a nice stretch in the Redding pen; it was in the papers. Now, look, Lambie Pie: Dohty charged me twenty grand for springing me. It just happens that I'm planning a long vacation, and I'll need that dough. How about it?"

She looked around the room, and

now her heart was romping right along. In the receiver against her ear was background noise. The tangle of conservation, the clink of bottles, a shout, meant that Ned was patronizing one of Redding's bars.

"You're drunk," she stated.

"I am, am I? Could be. But suppose I drop by and pick up that kale?"

"You're out of your mind, Mr. Partridge," she said smoothly, though her heart was racing. "There isn't two thousand dollars in the bank. I've seen my husband's bank book and I know."

"Don't give me any of that blop," he said disgustedly. "I ought to know; I paid him twenty grand. That dirty word never paid taxes on any of his graft; you don't believe he banked it; you aren't that naïve, sweetheart. I'd guess he has upwards of sixty grand in cash behind a loose brick in the fireplace."

"You can threaten all you like," she said, "but the only money I know about is in the bank."

INVOLUNTARILY her glance went to the fireplace, which was made of fieldstone. She had already searched it, and looked for hiding places everywhere else in the house, too. Also, there wasn't a place in the house where there wasn't a button handy, in kitchen, bath, closets, garage; near was a quill pen with the crimson plume sticking up out of a bowl of colored mother-of-pearl chips; the nibs was pinched between a spring clip, and when it was pulled out a circuit was made, an alarm rang in an agency office in town, and cops came. Dohty had showed her where all the places were so that she wouldn't be setting off alarms accidentally. He didn't want any investigations.

"I'm not fooling," Partridge warned. "You find that dough, and no playing around with the cops, either."

"Come and get it," she invited. "Come right over."

He was silent, then said at length, "I know about the alarm buttons Dohty installed all over the house; we'll do it this way: I'm going to stick around town for a week for various reasons. I'll call you again and give you instructions for meeting me with the money. That money's mine. And don't talk to the cops." He hung up.

He might as well have said, "Do as I tell you, or I'll kill you." Murder was in his careful, rather sneering voice.

She replaced the handpiece carefully as though it were stick-candy and rose, thrusting her hands into the pockets of her slacks man-fashion. Frowning, she moved to the fireplace. She had explored it thoroughly, and didn't do it again. But she got her shoulder under the slab of oak that was the mantle, and lifted hard; she couldn't budge it; it was solidly a part of the room's architecture.

Money had no earmarks. Whatever Dohty left was hers, and she had no intentions of turning over a dime of it to an ex-convict. Perhaps Partridge really thought the money belonged to him, when he'd still be doing time except for Dohty. Her husband had talked about Partridge many times, and about men going "stir crazy." The fact remained that she knew absolutely that Dohty had a lot of money, but she was getting tired of trying to imagine where *she* would hide it in this house. She had gone through the house conscientiously, by the square foot. She had shadowed Dohty, studied his labyrinthine personality for clues until she thought she would develop a colony of frogs in her throat like him. And she still hadn't an inkling.

Noting the time, she idled over to the heavy walnut chest where she had been exercising earlier. It was here that she had broken her watch crys-

tal, and she brushed the cushion for glass splinters automatically as she hunkered down to examine the chest's big lock.

She knew what was inside—the tools, the best of his stock, parts, a couple of pounds of old keywinding watch mechanisms, watchcases and a little scrap gold—what remained of his watch repairing business. Everything was neatly boxed. The trouble was, it was heavy stuff to handle, and she had to replace everything just as she found it. She had picked that lock once.

With a start she remembered that Dohty was dead and she didn't have to worry about getting caught at snooping. She picked up the pillow from the lid of the chest; she shook it, and tossed it into a chair. There was better than an inch of space between the back of the chest and the wall because of the baseboard and to allow the lid to be lifted. She looked down into this aperture, then slipped her hands in, got a grip on the chest and hauled away. She heaved mightily, but nothing happened.

She was surprised. She was quite strong, and she automatically planted her feet against the baseboard for leverage and strained until she shivered. Abruptly she said impatiently, "Hell!"

STRAIGHTENING up, she went to the garage for a pinchbar, and stuck the end of it in behind the chest. She pulled, and wood crunched both in the baseboard and the back of the chest.

The chest wasn't that heavy.

Suspicious, she put the pinchbar aside. She went around the chest at a crouch and she doubted very much that it was screwed to the floor. Just to prove that apples always fall to the ground, she grasped the brass handle at one end and lifted. The chest didn't lift. It tilted on concealed hinges in front; the handle was

swivelled, and finally Blanche eased the big box to rest on its keyhole.

THERE was a small trapdoor, the size of an unabridged dictionary, in the rectangle of exposed flooring. She lifted this, and in the cavity between beams reposed a white-enamel icebox container such as is used for small-fry vegetables like radishes and onions. Inside were neat packs of old and new banknotes mixed. She saw denominations. 20's, 50's, 100's, 500's. The thickest pack was of two-dollar bills. The thinnest, in a paper clip, was of 1,000's. No 5's. A mixed smell of mustiness and perfume, of money handled well, swelled from the box. She didn't count it. Replacing the lid on the metal box, she closed the trapdoor and returned the chest to position. Then she went swiftly to the screen door and slipped outside.

No. No one was around.

Up the lane she had a clear view of the road. She heard cars, and she saw the ambulance and police car go by. She waited, and smiled when Max didn't show up. There was a nice lad—Max—and from the way he looked at her she knew that he was aware of her.

She had left the light on in the garage and headed in that direction.

If you can get along without moon and stars it was a dandy night, and she did not return to the house right away.

CHAPTER V

Whose Alibi?

MAX didn't like his blue uniform; he proceeded directly to his lodgings in town and changed his clothes. He had worn the uniform for the last time. The job at the prison had been hateful and there was no point in keeping it any longer.

He phoned the police department

in the city and talked again with night captain Hoff.

"This is Tobin," he said. "Have you checked up on those men?"

"Yah. Wilder got drunk and somebody broke his come with a bottle in a brawl; he's in the hospital still unconscious. Davis is on the West coast." Hoff got sarcastic: "Partridge is in Redding, the last anybody spotted him. He got a full pardon, so it's kind of hard to just pull him in."

"Thanks." Max hung up.

So his man was in town, he reflected; he was indeed. Tall, lean Ned Partridge lounged against a tree, completely hidden by the darkness. To remain hidden he kept his cigarette cupped in his hand, and while he listened expressionlessly he kept glancing at the car parked nearby. He watched the drift of his cigarette smoke, and he heard Max phone Redding prison and ask for the whereabouts of simpy young George Bayma. At the prison they thought that Dohty's assistant had returned to the office, but he had gone away again because Employment was locked up and there were no lights.

Then Partridge listened critically while Max phoned Redding Police Headquarters. The watcher frowned ever so little, and casually he brushed the place at his shoulder where a gun would have been holstered if it didn't happen to be this particular night. At this distance he could have shot the knot out of Tobin's necktie. The detective was talking about murder and how it was committed. That finished, he sat for a stilly while.

It made Partridge grin, because smoke from the cigarette was drifting through the open window, and Max smelled it and was wondering about its origin. Little did he know Partridge was so near.

He called gently, "Tobin."

The detective didn't move. He answered, "Partridge?" pretty sure of the identity of the ex-convict from

his careful inflection, as though words were fragile and expensive.

"Do you want to see me?"

"Why should I want to see you, Ned?"

"Guys like me don't want any more trouble."

"What trouble, Ned?"

"I don't know, Max, but what there might be old folks sitting on their screen porches, hardly breathing so that they can hear better. Don't worry; I'm not carrying one of those things."

MAX rose unhurriedly, turned his back and walked to the door. He turned off the light, and hesitated before going from his own protective darkness into danger. Well, he had his gun, his fists and curiosity along with himself. He walked down the short, carpeted hallway, which was lighted with a dim globe overhead, and outside. Nobody.

"Here," Partridge said softly. He was sitting on the low wooden stoop. Bushes.

In a low voice of his own Max asked, "What's bothering you?"

"Take a walk," Ned answered.

He sauntered away down to the sidewalk, leaving it up to Max to follow.

"I guess you don't need that prison job any longer," Ned remarked when Max caught up. "Or going out? Funny how nobody likes a stiff in a prison uniform, even if some of the screws are good heads like you. I appreciated those tailor-mades."

"You knew they came from me, eh?"

"They didn't come from that—Dohty," Ned assured him accurately. "You caught me fogging up a couple of times and didn't give me a tumble. See?"

"I didn't know you were in your cell those times," Max admitted. "Tough break for me. How did you guess I was a dick?"

"Just had a idea about it. And there was a rumor that one of the screws was on two payrolls."

"Where do we stand now, Ned?"

"Well, you're a private detective they hired. Like a lot of people you figure that if a man has a chance to steal a lot of money, he'll go ahead and steal it and do a stretch on his ear, because he'll have that money to spend when he gets out. The bankers were so sure I had their money that they didn't raise any squawk when I got my pardon. They really didn't have much on me, and I was supposed to lead them straight to the kitty. I was supposed to have made a deal with Dohty, and they'd get him, too."

"A confederate enters the picture," Max suggested. "Possibly some girl you trusted. . . ."

"There isn't any girl you can trust."

"How would you arrange to get a bribe to Dohty without his taking everything?" Max asked. "Just an academic question. You'd have to have a partner."

"I could tell you one way. You remember the Employment Office? You couldn't say it was actually inside the prison walls. You get into it through a steel door inside, sure. But it's got a barred window and a barred gate, so the monkeys can look at the landscape while they're getting mugged and printed."

"So?"

"Outside the gate is a steel door that's closed at night. You wouldn't believe it, but the gate and the door are greased so you can just about open them by breathing on them."

"And?"

"Well, there are keys for those doors. Anyhow, there are keyholes."

"Who's got the keys?"

"I didn't claim that there were any. But I heard there was a set in a vault in town. And I guess there must be another set somewhere, because think how tough it would be, getting

into that vault past a time lock, just in case they had to have the keys some night after banking hours."

"So what?"

"Well," said Partridge, "I'm telling you how a man could be let out of the prison at night with no one the wiser but the man who let him out. If he just went out on an errand. . . ."

"Nuts," said Max.

"I was out," Ned said softly. "Why couldn't I be? I'm not the only one who ever got called down to Employment at night."

"What other ones?"

"What other ones went on errands? Joe Below Zero and Moe Kew. Are you kidding me?"

"All right: We're taking quite a walk. What are you getting at, by any chance?"

"I want to give you the idea that I haven't got any dough. I haven't got the bank's dough, and I don't know where it is."

"You're demented," Max suggested.

"The other thing is my alibi for tonight. Here we are." Partridge inclined his head in the direction of a parked car.

"That's no alibi," Max challenged.

"What's wrong with it?" The ex-con looked and then said with controlled fury, "That little tramp. . . ."

FROM the parked car it was only fifty or sixty feet to the Apple River, which was a broadish brook cutting through Redding. The nearest arc light was at the intersection two blocks away, so it was pretty shadowy, especially under the trees along the low river bank. The car was a sedan, and around it Max followed Partridge.

Partridge made a sound in his throat like the start of a curse, and legged it for the river.

From the bank they could hear gentle splashing and just see where the girl swam lazily. Ned said, "The

one minute I take my eyes off the car!" He called, not loud, "Barbara!"

There was no response.

"Maybe she didn't hear you," Max suggested. "Maybe she'll drown out there."

"One of these again," Ned told him ambiguously, and peeled off his coat. He stalked into the dark water. His strides made the water sound angry. He didn't have to swim; the river could be waded without trouble.

Out there the two of them carried on a violent, wordless altercation. Just as suddenly as the thrashing of water started, there was silence.

Barbara complained, "You were so long! I just thought I'd take a little swim."

"I told you I'd be right back!" he said venomously.

"You didn't tell me to stay in the car."

"Why didn't you answer when I called just now?"

"I wanted you to come in after me," she said simply.

She had an interesting, slow voice, with a caress in it that indicated she was drunk. Max listened with his arms akimbo, and didn't hear anything more. He looked off to his right, where the clustered lights of town made haze in the sky luminous.

He kept on listening, and he grinned.

They came in, and the girl turned out to be a typical, healthy country girl. Or town girl. Her wet clothes stuck to her like her coat of tan. She had spotted Max, and with unerring logic identified him as the fly in the night's ointment, a polecat.

"What does *he* want?" she demanded angrily. "Tell him to get out of our yard!"

"We're down by the river," Ned remonstrated humorously. "You know? The river?"

Max had all his wits about him, but he had never before been hit with such unexpectedness. She didn't sock

him, nor just shove; she catapulted her whole body at him and struck him with her full weight. Her head must have jammed into his cheek because a big light slapped on and then sifted away in motes before his eyes.

Actually he didn't know what had happened. Once he had been slugged, while he was at school; when he could recognize objects again he had the thug's blackjack in his left fist, and his right hand was bloody from hitting teeth, and he still had his wallet. This time he did the same thing, slugged it out with his assailant. But he couldn't get any leverage; he couldn't get his weight behind a blow because his feet weren't on the ground. As a matter of fact, he made a large splash in the river, and he tasted something like thin, cool soup with green mold stirred up into it.

After a while they got the situation untangled.

"You damned fool!" Ned said quietly, and all that Max could think of was that he had been suckered. He fought for his life when an arm hooked around his neck. Then he was fighting with both of them, and he was damned if the world wasn't full of strong girls.

There was a roaring in his ears; he strangled and got hold of a limb which turned out to be the girl's leg and gave her a magnificent boost. She soared free; Max churned in the water and occupied himself with Partridge.

HE HAD no recollection afterward of what he did, what luck he had, what was done to him. The next thought he had was that he had been in the water too long. Because he was shivering, and he always got angry when he did that as a kid.

Everything was quiet, and he was shivering. They had worked down the river a few feet and the water was at waist level. They were all totally exhausted, hanging together

and huddled, standing like three fools.

"All right," said Partridge first, just as Max was getting ready to hit him again. "I've got enough. Let's get onto dry land."

"What was the idea of that?" Max asked before he let go.

"I thought I was saving your life. I thought you were knocked cold and you'd start breathing water. The gal tried to brain herself on your chin."

Barbara said, "Neddie, make this man let go. I tell you, let's go and have a drink."

"Where?"

"Down at Chief's is all right."

"I must be going whacky," said Max. "Well, I'm agreeable."

"What do you think of my alibi?"

"You're trying awfully hard to prove one."

"Better take off those clothes and wring them. I've got towels somewhere here, too."

"All in preparedness, Good."

"Don't be sarcastic. I'm sticking around this town, when I should get as far away as I can, and from the town where the bank thing happened. You probably know that it's hard to keep your name out of the papers once it's been in. I was on the front pages. I'm just fixing it so that it won't happen again. I've done it twice already when they came looking for me when guys pulled a couple of bank jobs."

"A commendable idea. You must have a method."

"You bet your sweet life I have. Now in the case of Dohty—Chinese torture was too good for him. I can't think of a job horrible enough to do on him. When I went into Redding I weighed nearly two hundred. I was a hundred forty-two when I got my pardon, and I weigh only a couple of pounds more right now, and that on account of dinner and a few drinks."

"I admit I hated that bony old ghoul, but so did everybody. He put

me on the road job, and when it was twenty below I had to keep going—no warming shacks for me—and I froze my teeth and they abscessed. Then he put me in the tailor shop, where guys can't take it any longer and sew up their fingers so they *can't* work. The same in the laundry. Men would put their hands through the mangle. The snow jobs. The construction jobs. I got on all of them. But the worst was down at the quarry. That was a while before you started passing my cell.

"The men would get their feet in the way of a couple hundred pounds of granite, take a good wallop at the backs of their hands with a peen hammer. Crazy stuff. Back in my cell at night I'd blow stones out of my nose. Stones made of that damned gray powder we had to breathe all day. I almost went stir-bugs myself thinking that sooner or later I was going to get silicosis like a lot of those guys, and it was Dohty's doing. So I hated him a lot more than this sounds like. It's in a cell, or in solitary where I got myself a few times, that you can really do some hating."

"But you didn't kill him tonight."

"That's right. I didn't kill him."

"I wish I could believe you; you got a terrible deal."

"I'll show you," New promised. "All ready now?"

SOMETIME while Max was changing his clothes, Barbara was doing the same in the darkness.

Max had wrung out his suit, and when he had it on again it looked out of press more than a little. If anyone asked him any questions, he could explain simply that he had fallen in the river. Ned was ready.

They drove into Redding with Barbara sitting in the middle.

They were going along slow, looking for a parking place, when it jumped at them—something long and black and seemingly lazy in its

flight, until the air exploded just over the wheel of the car. The report was louder than a pistol shot, and it had death in it. All of them jumped, the girl screaming and trying to scramble into the back seat. Max's ears rang.

He was aware of Ned cursing, shooting the car forward, taking the corner and coming to a stop. The ex-convict glanced through the back window. They were half-turned into an alleyway, but Ned appeared to think the parking spot was as good as he could find. There was no time to look around.

"What the hell was that?" Max demanded. The whine was still in his ears, and his heart was beating right along.

Ned swore profanely that he did not know, but added, "You can bet anything that it was tossed in on purpose. For us."

There was a tiny cut on his cheek just below the eye, and he blotted away the trace of bleeding with a handkerchief. He was thankful his eye was safe.

"For us?" Max asked.

"For one of us. Probably for me, you, or the dame. Any one of us will do."

"But what was it?"

"You've got me," Ned confessed solemnly. "I don't know."

Is he lying? Max wondered. He thought of the funny tricks bullets play. They might hear the report of a bullet passing through the car, just missing all three. He didn't think of someone standing in the shadows waiting for them; someone expert with the whip; it was short-handled, and its twenty-foot length of braided, flexible lash was tipped with steel which had just grazed Partridge's face.

It was just a whipcrack in their faces but it was the professional kind. They turned the corner and entered Chief's.

CHAPTER VI

Who Stuck His Neck Out?

THIS bar was older than The Colonial across the street, but there was no choice except in what kind of crowd you wanted to have squandered money with.

Chief's had clusters along the bar, but there was plenty of room for resting an elbow and there was still a choice of tables. They went to the bar.

"It's on me," Ned insisted. "What'll you have?"

"Make mine Scotch."

"Same here."

"Three Scotches."

"Any particular brand?" asked Gordie, the barkeep. He was Gordon Chief himself, made out of pale pink hard rubber, bald, and the son of his old man.

"Make mine Auld Creepie," suggested Max.

"I'll have Tarantula Cream," Ned decided.

Barbara decided, "Twa Deed Corbies."

Gordie went aft, and returned aft three or four times with every third drink on the house, until Barbara was practically hanging onto the bar with her chin plus the grip of her hands on the rail. Her knees were bent.

"That must be three times since the first," Ned figured. "Gordie keeps track. One more round before the one on the house. He doesn't like it, because he can't get any more of that stuff. Hey, Gordie. One more round."

Gordie hovered, waiting to replenish the glasses for the one on the house; and Ned asked casually, "Say, what time did I leave here when I dropped in earlier?"

The barkeep named an approximate time. He was the owner and his word had weight and was final; besides, the only liquor he took was

what he got in cooking, so his memory was intact.

"Thanks. I just wanted to know," said Ned. The time given was about that of the murder of Doherty; besides, he had been here with the girl. It was quite pat; no budging this alibi.

Nevertheless, Ned took a little book from his pocket and showed it to Max. The book contained a complete record of what Partridge had done from the time he bought the notebook in a stationery store in Redding as soon as he got out of prison.

As a matter of fact, that was the first entry: "11:10 AM. Bought book this store." There were numerous signatures. There was the name of a garage mechanic who fixed the car when he was out with Barbara. The signature of a man with whom he went on a fishing trip. And so on. Mostly the recurring signature of his landlady, verifying the time he went to bed and the time he got up. "10:20 PM—6:00 AM, Sleep. Mrs. Brian Canneran." "1:00 AM—7." Tiresome detail. But it was all there in clear small handwriting.

"I told you I believe you," said Max after reading a few. "You don't have to show me this."

"Go ahead and read it," Ned insisted. Max got the impression that he was somewhat squiffed though he didn't show it. There was scarcely a shine of perspiration on his face. The only effect of the liquor was that his hands were sticky, for he said, "I'll be right back. I've got to go and wash my hands."

Max watched him while he walked steadily toward a conspicuous rear room, on whose lintel the capital letters were formed large in unpolished brass. With something of a buzz in his veins, Max looked back to the notebook, and kept turning pages. There was nothing much interesting. This wasn't a diary and there were few comments. It was factual and

concerned with proof, where Edwin Partridge had spent his time and how.

The only surprise Max received was because of the last entries. Partridge had written in his visit to Max, and noted the business at the river. The last entry noted the time when the three of them had entered Chief's.

PARTRIDGE emerged from the quaintly called Gentlemen doorway in Chief's, suddenly. He must have had a powerful throat, at which he was clawing, because he should have been dead in a few seconds. Every jaw in the place dropped to watch the performance. At least, eyes stared and mouths were open, because no one knew what to do. The first to move was Gordie, who cleared the bar in a beautiful vault as though he practiced the stunt nights when the bar was closed and no customers were around.

Partridge had crashed to the floor, and was traveling around in circles in the sawdust as his long legs pistoned. Before Gordie reached him, he flopped. He simply flung his arms and legs wide and lay perfectly still on the oily floor, sawdust in his hair.

Gordie was arriving so fast that he had to come astraddle before he could stop. Then he bent over, not bothering the body very much but just examining. He didn't slap, kick, nor show any brutality about having a wild drunk on his floor. Max stuck the notebook into his pocket and approached the scene. He left Barbara hanging onto the bar with her equipment.

"Back room," said Gordie, looking at Max.

The detective nodded and grabbed Partridge by the feet. The ex-convict's face was an unpleasant gray like that of a coin turned up in the garden. Or like glass on a forgotten shelf in an antique shop.

"I am a doctor," said a man who was wearing a suit as rumpled as Max's, and followed them.

In the back room Gordie said, "That guy never got drunk. He's sick."

"That guy's dead," said Max.

The man who claimed he was a doctor was, or had been, one.

He announced, "He's dead. He may be dead, but I know a drunk when I see one. I beg your pardon. I may have had a few drinks, but tha' man izh dead."

"From what?" Gordie snapped.

"Asphyxiation."

"Cripes. Cripes," Gordie moaned.

"I should have cleared the place out and left him there on the floor."

"It's all right," Max assured him.

"It doesn't make any difference. He was dead before he fell down."

"Shtrangled," said the doctor, peering. He had his face close enough to Partridge's throat to kiss it. There was a fold in the skin of the throat. The doctor spread the crosswise fold, and deeply embedded was something dark and ugly. With a long fingernail the doctor flicked the edge of the band. It was two or three bands, or more, stretched till the rubber was brown. The doctor turned around and went back to the bar or somewhere.

It was just that. Rubber bands of the big five-cent size, used for securing heavy packs of documents. They had been doubled and stretched to a noose, which had been brought down so hard over Partridge's head that his nose was skinned and one ear was torn. A man who had a thing like that around his throat wouldn't have a chance in the world of getting it off. And no one else could have gotten it off for him.

IT HAD happened in the lavatory, and probably no one had watched the door after Partridge had emerged.

It was a stupid thing. Max took a walk and pushed into the room for Gentlemen, and the old mahogany door closed with a whish and bump behind him.

There was nothing unusual about the architecture except for the fact that the solitary window opening on the alley was barred. He looked through the bars, the frosted windows being apart. Frosted glass, that is. The night was muggy, and light from the windows made ghosts of the fog in the alley.

The ground out there was cindery, he noted, because he was looking for footprints. It was all kind of crazy, as though an ingenious, criminal madman were on the loose on this particular night. There weren't any footprints, of course.

Opposite this window there wasn't anything but the corrugated iron walls of a closed garage. There was almost complete silence. Looking for evidence of murder was hopeless. He brought his face close to the bars, drew back a little and scowled.

Someone besides the murderer could have passed his hands through those bars, of course. It must have been a powerful man. Stretching those binders would require phenomenal strength, and of a different kind from the sort required to draw a bow. A specialized strength. Max tried to think of a trade where that kind of strength was required, where a man would have to stick his arms out straight, through bars for example, and then be able to separate something, such as spreading those rubber bands into a noose, as practicably as driving a wedge with a sledge hammer. That kind of muscle wasn't common.

THE bars were pocked with rust and were rough, painted over with black. Perhaps a man had knocked out his pipe on this bar, but Max couldn't find any carbon nor

tobacco crumbs. At his throat level, right there where he would peer out, the paint and rust was chipped away in a spot. There was a scratch where the iron was gray with the shine of the scraped metal.

Max opened a blade of his pocket knife and took off a flake of the bar farthest away. He nicked it with the point of the blade. The same. This would prove nothing, but this was the way it was done.

Some man with the strength of a gorilla had whispered through the bars, "Hey, Partridge. Hey. Come get tickled."

Or something. Partridge must have gone to the bars. The gorilla had the binders around one hand, slipped it through the bars while he confided something, and the rest was easy. The ape's other hand passed through the other bars, and the binders stretched, and Ned Partridge would have said, "Gog, glop," if he had been able to. After that, he simply went tearing out of the room for help. And flopped on the floor and made circles in the sawdust. In Chief's bar, to the flabbergasm of all.

THERE was nothing to do but leave Gordie to his troubles. Max went out to collect Barbara, because it was his bounden duty under the circumstances. He pried her hands loose from the bar and escorted her out. She could walk, oopsy-daisily, like a performer traversing a taut circus net. He took her to the car and got her daddy's address from her purse. Gals hang onto their purses no matter what happens. All the way to the house she made cooing love to him, calling him "Austin." That was neither his appellation nor the late Partridge's. Austin might have been quite a lad to have his name alone remembered. She was too befuddled to think.

Barbara was trying to kiss him, but the wheel was in the way. Be-

sides, he kept giving her gentle shoves and saying, "Uh-uh."

In front of her pop's house he got out hastily and said, "Mr. Walsh, I presume?" That being her father's name.

The old gentleman uttered a sound something like "Yare."

He then pounced with anticipation upon his comely daughter, who had gotten out of the car also. He had come galloping down the sidewalk from the screen-porch so fast that she was totally unaware of his presence.

Max lingered to watch, and also because he thought he ought to try to convince the man that it was not he who had been out with his Miss. The old gent was built like a grandfather's clock and had chopped many cords of wood in his day.

Dad Walsh paused to look up at Max and ask, "What *you* want? Git!"

"By all means," Max assured him. He walked down the street under the dark elms.

Anyhow, the man who had tried to take off Partridge's head with the bullwhip was the one who had finally gotten him through the bars of the boys' room in Chief's saloon.

What Max thought of was extremely simple and it made him stop in his tracks and stop whistling the bars of Old Lady O'Grady.

Suppose Partridge had done it himself!

That would be one hell of a knot to untie.

CHAPTER VII

Graveyard

NEXT, it would be a good idea to see and talk to George Bayma and watch his eyes. Bayma was the lad. Dohty's assistant was a youth who was going places. He would have looks besides when he outgrew his pimples. He knew as much about the

office as Dohty did, and he'd get Dohty's job because Dohty was going to quit. That was the trouble with it. Why kill Dohty in a fantastic way when Bayma needed to wait only a few months, perhaps weeks? Bayma knew that. It had to be Partridge, then because, damn it, there wasn't anybody else.

On the other hand, Bayma might have turned impatient or gone stir-crazy. Psychiatrists have been known to commence plucking leprechauns out of the air, after a while. Bayma had been working in the prison long enough. In prison. Crime. He might have gotten to thinking that he was quite a smart lad, and he would try his hand at committing a crime in a way which would baffle. Max didn't know how good Bayma was with a bullwhip, but the fact remained that he was suspiciously hard to reach tonight. It was necessary to see Bayma.

He stopped in at Chief's again, and used the telephone. He called the prison, and the few other numbers he could think of as likely. No. Bayma had turned into a ghost.

"One on me?" Gordie asked. Quiet was already restored here.

"Well," Max said, thinking, "yare." He had that one, bought one, and hid himself home and to bed. He dreamed that night of snakes, and of himself sitting up high where they couldn't reach him. And there was a tiger in the room. That woke him up and made him turn the light on. He turned it off, and slept, and the tiger was still there.

Because it has been proved before that even though one is outside, there can be two in a room.

IN THE morning he walked to Doomboorajian's, the stationery store, after his suit had been pressed. He bought some five-cent rubber binders.

"Kind of a stiff price to pay," he

observed. "What I ought to do is start cutting up old inner tubes."

"Those are all right if the tubes are new," Doom said pleasantly. "What do you want them for, anyhow?"

"Measuring."

"How?"

"From end to end."

"You want a tape measure."

"No. But five cents is a lot for a hunk of rubber like this. You're asking too much."

"That's good rubber. New. You don't need so many, why don't you help yourself at the prison? You work there, isn't it?"

"At the prison?"

"Shoo-er, yes," said Doom. "One dozen boxes, let me see, about three months ago, I think it was the screw—I mean the officer—named Gogarty came in the place and bought them, and I was surprised, pardon me, because I think personally a piece of twine is more satisfactory, but people are lazy, they can order something when they get into a job like that, and by golly they buy nutting but the best, I am ashamed. I don't gyp somebody. I told him so. I got one cent a box, and I prove it right here. I keep my papers. I sell other things too there. Look."

"No. Gogarty. Sure, he's in purchasing."

"It's the same guy," said Doom confidently. "Red hair."

"Pinkie Gogarty."

"Ee. Him. Freckles."

"All over," said Max. "I'll bet he's got them on the balls of his feet."

"Ee!" Doom agreed, laughing silently. "But help yourself, why don't you? I sold them to the prison, and you don't have to buy. Here is your money back, I don't gyp anybody, they are entirely too expensive. Rope is good, better."

"No." Max shook his head and stuffed the binders into his pocket. He walked out. The tub of a man

named Doom shouted after him, "Tape measure!"

Max walked back into the shop and said, "No, Doomie, no. Don't do that. Crowds will gather. Did I pay you?"

"Ee."

MAX walked down the street licking around his lips one way, and then the other. And then he thought to himself, No wonder; I've either eaten a gargoyle or I've got a hang-over. This is crazy.

He walked into a shop, getting out of the bright sunlight, and ordered steak and eggs. The smell of it made his eyes feel as though they had been wound up tight, and now they were spinning like mad as they unwound.

He said to nobody, "Have it for yourself," and laid his money on the counter, and got out of there.

Walking into the Colonial he thought of better places to be. It was starched. It made him think of spinning wheels, and the floor had a shine that made him afraid of slipping. It was cool and dark, and a man in a uniform was looking at him. The man had been inspecting the dustlessness of tables.

"What are you doing here?" Max asked.

"I am George Flefford," the man responded politely. "As it happens, I am just here."

"Right on time," Max complimented him. "May I lie on your bar?"

"You may try, sir," said Flefford, "until company comes. It is right there. Then you will have to get off."

"The trouble with me is that I run into too many interesting people," said Max. "I feel like an outsider."

"It's a peculiar condition, isn't it, sir?" Flefford asked.

"I'm talking with pixies," Max said. He turned his back and went to the bar and felt morose. He had three drinks, and then he ordered a steak and ate it though it was as tough as though it were artificial rubber.

He was a new man altogether. He thanked whatever gods may be for his unconked soul.

Getting his car, he started for Redding Penitentiary with his prison guard's uniform on the seat beside him. The last time he would see the inside of the prison, he hoped, was right ahead, when he would be turning in the uniform.

He took the upper road.

CARS were parked along there where Dohty had parted with his beloved motorcycle. Max stopped, and found that they were still looking for Dohty's head. It was ridiculous that the noggin could have gone bounding completely out of ken. He joined the hunt. He wondered how it would look when found.

Cutting into the woods on the tangent which he guessed the noodle would follow, he proceeded a couple of hundred feet without finding anything. He met another man hunting, so headed away. He picked up a stick, with which he whipped away weeds and the thick foliage of plants.

All by his lonely, he entered a sloping clearing where the ground was nearly bare. There was thick moss, and he kicked free a clump of the stuff and examined it. He looked around the irregularly-shaped passage because it was a place not to be forgotten. He walked in farther, and breathed words of astonishment.

The hush was complete, and the dust motes appeared to be fixed in the air. Nothing moved. Here was death. The dust in the air was a sublimation of dead things. That had never occurred to him before.

Bones. God. The skeletons of the creatures lay intact in collapsed attitudes which were infinitely pitiful. Dozens of them. Heaped. Huddled. Crawling. Outflung. All of them different in position and most of them picked clean. There were two cows, a dog with a collar around its neck,

squirrels, birds. Bones all over the place.

Growing profusely in the glade—he hunkered down and examined one of the specimens which stood in the perfection of maturity. He did not know the name of this mushroom, which happened to be the *amanita muscaria*, the fly mushroom. Deadly. It was princely, an aristocrat of mushrooms, tall and perfect, a poisonous parasol. It had a ring around its stem where the veil had broken from the broad cap, and the stem emerged from the telltale cup at the ground.

In color the cup was pale amber and was shiny with a viscous film which was sprinkled with encrustations as appetizing as powdered sugar. This was not the famous "Angel of Death," but it was the Angel's nearest cousin. Aside from its thrilling beauty, the only good thing to be said about it is that it kills flies which come to it because of its odor. The odor was there, and so were the flies.

One of the muscarias was nibbled. That meant a dead squirrel.

Not a nice way of dying—eating this mushroom. The most violent, horrible, unimaginable agony.

THIS, thought Max, was just about the most unpleasant place where he had ever been. It was grim. And also there was a kind of ferocious humor in it. The cows, of course, got the mushrooms when they grazed in this devilish place. That was too bad, cows being domesticated and all right except when they are breachy.

But along comes a squirrel to nibble, having nibbled mushrooms many a time and oft without getting a stomach ache. This time, he starts chattering in a torment and races up the tallest tree to escape the unknown which accompanies him. He has a million enemies tearing him to pieces, plucking out his fur hair by hair un-

til his pelt is flayed from him. He is a ball of the awfulest pain, a mad riot of motion, still alive, trying to explode in all directions at once. He has fallen from the top of the tree and rebounds from the ground like rubber, and runs up to the top of the tree again blind and screeching, and leaps, trying to float in the air to leave behind the scorching fright.

It doesn't end, it isn't quick. Any hunter watching would split his sides laughing at first, and then he would simply stare, sober. . . . So the poisoned squirrel lies on the ground, finally. Coursing through the woods comes the farmer's dog with the strap and brass nameplate around his neck. The dog pounces on the squirrel, uses his paws and tears the furry rodent apart. He bolts the insides of the pelt. Death then comes to the dog, and dogs sense it a long way off, and Rover howls. Dismally with terror. And a thunderstruck dog is something to watch. Also hilarious at first. Not later.

Then come the carrion eaters. A crow alights on the ground, and walks around the dead shepherd. It is nervous and ready to take flight, but it pretends to be unconcerned and pauses to preen itself. It stabs a bill through a wing, doing no toilet whatsoever. It takes flight, for about two yards, and comes back walking, curious and incredulous.

Tremendously daring, the big black bird gets close, and drives its bill into the quiet dog's back, and takes a short, alert flight. No live dog in the world would take a puncture like that. The flight brings the crow back close, and it swishes its wings in the air, enabling it to alight gently on the dog's head. Also, ready to take off fast in an upward plunge of black feathers. A cunning bird, the crow.

But now it is certain, with its claws sunk in the dog's fur. It walks between the dog's ears, stands, gets set. It lifts its mischievous beak to

regard another crow, and then turns to the task of picking out the succulent eyes of the dog.

Shortly, dead crow.

Max rose, with the sunlight jittered on him because of the high canopy of foliage overhead. The dust motes in the leaning spears of light were so still that he could have reached out and plucked them and heaped them up in the hollow of his hand, they were so hard, diamond-like, solid. A handful of grains of gold. Everything fixed fast. Every green leaf arranged in the air in its pattern, never to move. Even the odor was steady, constant.

Something without much weight struck him and tumbled away to the ground. It was of no importance, no more than the stem of a heavy leaf pricking him on the side of his face when it bounced from his shoulder.

But there it lay on the ground—a pair of eyeglasses with white-gold rims glittering.

CHAPTER VIII

What a Girl!

DISINCLINED to believe it, Max touched the scratch on his cheek warily, staring. Spectacles. He looked up in slow motion, ducked, and ran to the edge of the glade. He filled his lungs and let the breath out with the caution of a man wondering whether he was, at last, bats.

Whatever the tree was, elm or maple or oak or cottonwood, it had a thick trunk that went straight up like a shot. Way up there, a limb stuck out across the boneyard.

A rope was attached to the limb. To the other end of the rope was fastened a man.

"How," Max asked, "did Willie the Pixie ever climb up there to hang himself?"

Willie was quite dead. He didn't swing, didn't turn on his necklace.

His arms hung at his sides and his fingers were curled absently. His head was tilted, listening for the music of Atlantis; the tilt of his head was because of the rope, which was a good golden yellow just recently bought.

Willie was as neat and presentable as a chickadee's egg. His clothes were immaculate, and there wasn't a crease in the trousers nor jacket. It was a single-breasted suit, and just a spot of white shirt showed in the bottom "V" of the vest between the vest and belt. The black, shined shoes hung pigeon-toe fashion.

Willie was slight, weighing approximately one hundred and seventeen pounds, a girl's weight. His face was small and pleasant, and the features were arranged with unutterable calm. He had a slender nose which was straight and waxen, with fine nostrils, and his ears were set close to his head, one of them being interestingly crinkled at the lobe. The hair was thin, blond, ruffled by the occasional breezes of the past few days. The socks were black silk. There was a withered flower in his lapel. His shoulders were chalked with bird droppings, and there was a bird on his shoulder, busy. Willie didn't have any eyes.

In an outrage, Max jerked out his gun. He fired to explode the bird, and then shot it in the air. It was clearing the high foliage when he hit it first. By the time the thunder had died away he had socked three out of five shots through the crow. A bunch of startled crows soared cawing over the dense woods. Max fired. A crow wobbled in flight, losing feathers, but kept on flying.

He had just reloaded the gun when the girl remarked, "It's too bad they're not good eating."

It was Blanche Gerard, or Dohty. She was standing at the opposite edge of the glade, watching him with interested eyes.

"That's one bird I enjoy killing," he said. He was inexpressibly shocked. He looked at her.

She didn't answer.

Putting his gun away, Max got up from the ground and brushed himself off. He said, "I don't like those birds."

"Why? Slit their tongues, and they talk like parrots."

"I don't think I'd like to hear them talking like parrots."

He looked up angrily at Willie the Pixie, and the girl followed his gaze.

HE BROUGHT his attention down at once, and Blanche stared at him without expression. Her eyes were wide, and her lips were red and moist, parted in the beginning of a smile. She glanced up again at Willie, with a mere jerk of her head, as though to make sure of what she had certainly seen the first time. Willie was still there, and would hang there till cut down.

"I didn't do that," Max explained, referring to Willie.

The girl sat down, which is what intelligent people do sometimes when they are convinced that they would faint otherwise. Max galloped over to her, concerned, and got down. Here was an uncommonly attractive girl. Her eyes seemed bruised, as though she had been up late a lot, making her more interesting still. There was an unusual brightness in her eyes, too.

Whether she started it or not he wouldn't know, but he was kissing her with complete involvement. There he was, astonished at himself. A hanged man, hanging right overhead and unexplained, and here he was in the woods kissing a girl for all he was worth.

He turned in his uniform and asked for Bayma, Dohty's young simp assistant. The lad had not been around, hadn't arrived. Max was let out via the elevator, and for a mo-

ment he sat in his car with indecision.

Bayma. He got out of the car and walked around the administration building and down along the prison wall. He was out of sight of everybody as he went, even the wall squirrels in their tower perches. So he got to the door in the wall, the door to the employment office. There were trees all around. The warden's mansion stood on a knoll and was hidden in trees.

He tried the door. He was nuts, because it was open. It just opened. It was a big steel door and it opened with no more sound than something carefully done.

He walked out again. He looked at the barred window, into the office through the dirty glass. Then he walked in, and he was totally flabbergasted that there wasn't anybody to watch him.

Here was another dead man, and he didn't believe it.

Young Bayma was lying on the floor at the window, and he had died the way Partridge had. He had been snagged around the throat. Rubber binders. Max took the binders out of his pocket, and they were the same. They were marked.

Leaving Bayma there, and feeling bad, Max went back to his car. He started the motor.

It was all a hell of a piece of nonsense. He was incredulous, because there couldn't be a girl like that. She was a nice girl.

He had an idea in his mind. He didn't think it was so, but he went back to find out. He drove back along the upper road. He stopped at that tree, and he was all alone.

It was silly, the way he remembered everything. There was the girl. Her husband was Elmer Dohty. That man was a marvelous mechanic and had been a watchmaker. Everything in his garage was in perfect order. The tool shop. He had a bench along

one side. And there was a bicycle, and it was an old one, high-wheeled, a racing bicycle. Slim-rim tires.

He remembered. He had looked out for all kinds of trouble, and he had looked up Blanche Gerard. She had done everything. She had modeled, raced cars, acted. . . . The works. She was a strong girl, as strong as a man.

And she could ride that bicycle.

That was how she had gotten through the woods so fast.

And how she had gotten into town to throttle Partridge, whom she had known before. And she had gotten the binders from Bayma, whom she had loved. . . .

MAX was looking at the trunk of the tree where something was glittering in the sunlight. Glass. Little pieces, sharp and bright.

He picked out a piece, and then something soft, then terribly hard, passed around his throat. It was Blanche's arm, and she was deliberately trying to throttle him.

He fought like mad. Just that. It was something like having a rope around his neck, and then he was on top. He got up, and pitched, and brought the girl down so hard over his head that for a minute he was scared that her blood would burst through her flesh.

He stared at her, not willing to believe that there was such a girl. And he had the stuff, and she knew it.

Out of the bark of the tree.

The splinters of the crystal of her watch.

This one couldn't be denied, now.

The coroner, Murphy, came driving by and looked on with great interest.

"Anything I can do?" he asked.

"No. No," said Max, struggling with it right along. "I'll knock this one over the head and you can take it right along. It's a dead man."

FOLLOW THAT GIRL!

(Continued from page 23)

I drove into Monterrey with my head spinning like a top. After we found a good cafe, I left Rhoda to make a phone call, explaining that it was to my friends in Laredo, Texas, and that I was arranging for her to stay with them for awhile.

I recovered my senses sufficiently to make the phone call, then I returned to our table. The meal was very good. There was hot tea in red crock pitchers and Rhoda made large gray eyes at me and I was at peace with my fellow man. I had almost forgotten why I was even in that sleepy old land of enchantment.

"Happy?" asked Rhoda, as we walked back to the car.

"Umm," I managed to say.

It took us three hours to drive to the border. I herded the old convertible through the streets of Nuevo Laredo, on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, then toward the international bridge over the river. We passed Mexican Customs without many formalities and approached the American side of the river. The American Immigrations and Customs Offices were dead ahead of us. There they would examine our luggage. There was a long line of cars behind us, all jostling and bumping the car in front. All were tired, hot and in a hurry. I knew, because so was I.

Then it happened—the spare tire blew out. Rhoda jumped as if I had slapped her.

I grinned. "Take it easy, baby, only a blowout. I'll drive on the rim until we clear customs."

Her wide, baby-blue eyes were still frightened. "But that will ruin the tire won't it, and maybe the wheel?"

"Can't help it," I said. I shoved the car into a lower gear and fed gas

to it. We bumped, and I do mean "bumped" along to the place where we stopped for customs inspection.

Rhoda glanced at me. "What's the matter with the car? What makes it bump?" she asked. She seemed genuinely concerned. It was nice of her to worry about the welfare of my old tin lizzie.

I shrugged. "I'll guess with you," I said. I was feeling the lawdog veneer being sprayed on me again. A Federal operative first, a ladies' man second. Why? Because a random thought had just scuttled past the door of my conscious mind. It had to do with Rhoda and with that flat tire.

A COUPLE of customs officials finished with the car ahead of us and walked over to get our luggage. They were up close before they recognized me. Smiling, they shook hands with me. One was tall and lanky. The other was short and stocky. Both were Texans. Both were hot-wind-burned a chocolate brown. They were my Laredo "friends" I had called, the ones that Rhoda had been going to stay with.

I turned to look at Rhoda. She was looking at me. I think she realized that I knew the score now. She almost had me fooled at first, until the tire blew out. She wasn't fooling anybody now and she knew it. Sure, I had called my friends here, telling them I was coming. I figured she was carrying dope, but didn't know exactly where. I was hoping desperately that she didn't have it, however, and that I had been wrong in thinking—

"This the skirt you called us about, Coffey?" asked the slim official.

"That's her," I said sadly.

"Sa'shame to put the nab on a

classy number like her," said Shorty. "Where's she got the stuff?"

"In the flat tire I think," I said. "She must have had someone slit the tube and dump in the dope, then vulcanize it back and put the tire back on the wheel, before we left Mexico City."

Rhoda was getting out of the car. Shorty put the clutch on her. He seemed to be enjoying his work.

"Coffey, wait!" she said. "I didn't know anything about that tire. Believe me, I—"

"So long, baby," I said. There were large lumps in my throat like link sausage, and the nerves to my stomach were coiled like bedsprings. My heart had meanwhile curled up and died.

"It was nice loving you," I added.

I turned my head while they carried her away. I wasn't fooling myself, it wouldn't be easy to forget her. I was the tender, sensitive kind that

loved deeply. It was unfortunate that I had to get emotionally involved with a dirty little heart hunter who only used men as pawns to serve her own devious ends.

I was so mentally out of banks that I almost missed seeing the pretty little *senorita* with the legs. They were very nice legs, I thought, with a connoisseur's perception. But wait, I thought, what of Rhoda? I had been crazy for the dame!

I hurriedly rearranged my emotions and followed the *senorita*.

She's lovely, isn't she? asked Conscience.

"Yes," I answered. "Wonder what she looks like from the front?"

"Leave us go look," said Conscience.

You see what you can do if you set your mind to it? There I was, ready to pick up the broken threads and start life anew. And with a brand new rebuilt conscience.

THE BAMBOO DEATH

(Continued from page 31)

The blonde gave a sharp command. As if coming out of a trance, the two Javanese and Melali's Chinese captors gave chase. Halfway up the stone steps, Beau stopped, to give Melali time to reach the top. He saw the *kris* shining in Ah-Mat's hand, and grabbed at the sinewy wrist, sent the knife spinning. He threw a powerful left at Ah-Mat's jaw, and grinned happily as the little man went spiralling backward against the on-coming Si Irpan. Together they toppled down the stairs, to block the way of the two Chinese in a tangle of brown legs and arms.

Beau whirled, took the steps two at a time, and joined the waiting

Melali. She kicked off the high-heeled slippers, to run free at his side toward the lower gallery. Beau was thankful for those days spent in the old temple, for to have taken the wrong turning would have been fatal. They heard their pursuers pounding after them as they reached the entrance and burst out onto the street. A welcome sight was a native *Mata-mata* padding toward them.

LATER, as they sat in the police station waiting for the American Consul to join them, Beau asked: "How did you find that black case, Melali? I thought I had it hidden securely."

"I hid outside the window and watched you," Melali admitted.

"Well, tell me, what's so startling about that doll's yellow umbrella?"

"Only the Emperor may use a yellow umbrella," Melali explained, smiling at his bewilderment.

"Then how did you—you *did* leave that one in the chair in my house, didn't you?" His eyes were tender as he looked at her.

A flush warmed the honey of Melali's cheeks.

"Yes," she said softly. "I hoped it might protect you. You see, the Emperor is my cousin—many years ago he gave it to me."

Beau gulped and looked unhappy.

"Royalty!" he said.

"But I'm just a poor relation," she said, and laid her slender hand in Beau's.

FLIRTING WITH THE CHAIR

(Continued from page 49)

Maule and told him to come out and see what was up. While he was here, an argument developed, and you bashed his head in with a rock."

"Sounds like you've been dosing yourself with too many radio serials," he sneered, but he made no move to open the door.

"Open up in there!" a firm voice came through the panel. "This is a police matter!"

"Using the key Maule carried, you stuffed the body in the trunk," I went on as evenly as I could. Time was growing short. I had absolutely no proof of anything I said. If the cops come in now, I was the patsy they'd grab. "Then you phoned the police, tipping them off about the route I was taking into the City! You set a trap for me to fall into, but I got away!"

Claire had been staring at us silently. Now she spoke: "Peter, remember when you called. Allen was here in this room. He told me to have you go downtown. He said he'd leave me alone if you delivered the money immediately. That must have been another trap because Allen refused to take the money when he was here earlier. I couldn't understand his sudden change."

"It was a trap," I said. "That clears up another matter. For awhile I thought it must have been you, Claire, who tipped the police."

I turned to Dickerson. "You'd better open the door," I said. I pulled the twisted *Persian* cigarette from my pocket. "I want them to have this cigarette. Funny, these things have often been called coffin nails. In this case, that's the literal truth. This cigarette is going to send you to the chair!"

That did it. Dickerson, his face a mask of fury, charged towards me. He was heavier than I, but I wasn't worried about that. I felt good all over as my fist crashed against his straight nose.

He snorted, blood sprayed over his white shirt front. I tossed the cigarette to Claire and bored in. The first punch had given me too much confidence. He was fighting for his life. The next thing I knew he was bending me back over the table edge. I felt the solid mahogany dig into my back. Blood roared in my ears.

Then, suddenly, his weight was gone from my body. He was charging after Claire who was running for the door.

His fingers clutched at her. Cloth

burst with a sibilant hiss. I caught a glimpse of creamy white flesh.

And then I hit him. I hit him behind the jaw, with all the power I could whip into the punch. He staggered, and went down.

Before he hit the floor, the outer door crashed open. Two cops, guns drawn, piled into the room. One of them grabbed me. I heard him snap, "Peter Hoyt, you're under arrest for murder! . . ."

She was lovely. Her pale oval face seemed to glow from within. Her gray-green eyes, filled with a peculiar look, never left me. She had changed to a crimson lipstick that gave her lips a full, sultry look as though they might burst like ripe grapes beneath the pressure of a kiss.

I TRIED to concentrate on what I was saying to the Assistant D. A., but it was tough. Claire was close, and that filled my mind, crowding out everything else.

"Allen Dickerson," I went on, "was the kind who never has cigarettes or matches. He was always mooching both. That came to me this morning when I saw him wandering around, unlit cigarette in his mouth, looking for a match. That same thing had happened the previous night. He had taken one of Claire's cigarettes but never lit it. When he stuffed Maule's body into the trunk, the cigarette fell from his mouth.

"When I saw the cigarette, knowing that Claire alone, of all the people I know, smokes that brand, I suspected she did it." I smiled an apologetic smile at her. She grinned back and said forget it.

"So," I went on. "I got into this mess. I know I should have gone to the police the second I found the body, but you understand how I felt."

The Assistant D. A. scowled. "Mr. Hoyt," he said heavily, "too many people think that they can juggle around the facts in a murder case. You might have seriously interfered with the wheels of justice. . . ." He paused and looked at both of us. Maybe we looked silly but they say love makes you look that way. Anyhow, a big grin came across his face and he let the rest of the sermon drop. Shuffling several papers he said cheerfully: "As material witnesses you two have to stay where we can get you when needed, but maybe we'll relax the rules for a honeymoon."

When we were outside, she asked: "Like my new lipstick?"

"Sure do!" I said. "It tastes swell. But I like that old brand by now. That's what tipped me that you couldn't have dropped the cigarette. There was no lipstick on it!"

Maybe the people in that street thought we were bats, but you don't think of people when you're sampling your best girl's lipstick!

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SO NEAR, SO DEAR, SO DEAD!

(Continued from page 55)

you'd be in back and could hear the saw ripping through wood from there. He was doing something for you—your lattice—that would plant the sound of the saw in your mind. But when he heard your footsteps overhead going outside, he started a new strip on the saw. As soon as the saw cut through a few inches, just enough to clear the blade, he tapped a staple or wire nail in the forward end of the veneer, hooked a strong screen door spring to that, stretched the spring to the forward end of the work table. The pressure of the spring pulled the wood forward against the saw, kept it cutting, and to keep the wood from working up over the saw, he placed a piece of brick on it. With the saw rigged to continue cutting, the strip was long enough to give him time to come up here.

"His wife thought nothing of his appearance. Perhaps he had a piece of wood in his hand—but he had just come out of his shop, hadn't he? Perhaps her back was to him when he struck her without the slightest warning. As she slumped unconscious, he broke her neck, something that's easily done with an unconscious person if you give his—or her—head just the right quick snap.

"It was a very simple matter for him to drop her at the foot of the stairs, toss the towels at random on the stairs from the laundry hamper, and scurry back to the basement.

"He thought he had played in luck. If he hadn't had the chance to kill her then, he'd simply have waited. It would have been nothing but one effort lost that only he knew about. Back in the basement, he ripped away the spring, pulled the staples or nails, and tossed the spring and brick

over in the side of the basement, to be disposed of later. He figured there was nothing suspicious in them anyway—and there wouldn't have been if I hadn't noticed the one mistake he did make—that empty fishfood box on the phone stand that he overlooked—and tried to figure how he could be up here and down in the basement sawing wood at the same time."

SWEAT was gleaming on Blackwell's face. And the face was gray. It looked flabby, bleated, swimming in Mason's gaze.

"That fishfood box was a mighty little thing to trip you, Blackwell. But now there's no stopping me. I'm going to send you to the electric chair! Now that we know what to look for, we'll find it. If you hit her with a block of wood, maybe a few of her hairs snagged on its edge. We'll wear you down, like cats with a rat. Damn you, we'll fry you, Blackwell! So many little things we'll find to nail you in the chair!"

Blackwell lunged. His eyes were mad. His fist crashed in Mason's mouth. Mason sprawled back, tasting blood.

Mrs. Holcombe's scream, Doctor Dennison's shout, Hawkins' roared curse all blended with the frantic pound of Blackwell's running feet.

He took the nearest way out, directly through the French doors. Across the lawn, toward the hedges and trees there that would shelter him, where he could lose himself, and perhaps make a clean escape.

But he didn't reach the hedges. Mason and Hawkins pounded onto the lawn. Hawkins fired, missed.

Mason fired, and didn't

Blackwell, almost to the hedges, threw up his hands loosely, took two more staggering steps, and crashed to his face.

Hawkins was beside Mason when Mason reached the body of Cicero Blackwell. Hawkins looked at the back of Blackwell's head and felt sick. He had to turn his face away.

"Sometimes," young Hawkins muttered, "I ain't sure I'm cut out to be a cop." He wiped his hand over his forehead, stared at Mason and whispered, "Tell me, Mason, what it felt

like. I mean, he was getting away and you had to stop him—but what did it feel like when you raised the gun and blew the back of his head out?"

Mason's face was set, slick. "I don't know. I hadn't thought of it. At the second I shot her murderer, I felt closer to her than I ever did before. He'd forfeited every right to her, by killing her, hadn't he? And as I raised the gun, drew a bead, and pulled the trigger, I felt kind of like I was being married to her. . . ."

A SPOT OF DETECTING

(Continued from page 75)

your wife and Stratton and Warfield."

"I know nothing about Karl Boehm," Shelby said, "except that I discharged him after learning that he had a prison record. He was ugly about it. He may have lied—"

"No good, Shelby," Fields cut him off. "You don't think we took the word of a louse like Boehm? He furnished evidence. Plenty. Seems he was planning for a long time to take you along if he got nabbed. Get your hat. You're going in—and the charge ain't bailable."

Shelby stood silent for a moment. Then he shrugged and sat down in the leather chair. "I'm not going to jail," he said. "If you will take chairs I'll tell you why. I am not a man who can safely be pushed around or interfered with, Captain. Others have learned that and—"

"Anything you say may be—" Fields began. He always made a point of warning suspects. Shelby's invitation to sit had been ignored.

"I know," Shelby smiled thinly, "but you will not use anything, Cap-

tain. I am always prepared for emergencies. Karl Boehm is a stupid fool—but I'm not. If he had carried out my instructions that gun would never have been found. He may remember that in the electric chair."

You'll burn," Fields said, "but state's evidence will probably get Boehm a life sentence—unless we can pin a murder on him that you didn't have a hand in."

A savage gleam appeared in Shelby's eyes. "That you shall do," he said as he took a small silver cigarette case from his jacket pocket and opened it. "There is evidence in my bank vault that will convict Boehm of the murder of the watchman at the Gregg warehouse shortly after Boehm was released from Sing Sing. That's why his services have been available to me—and not too expensive. You are welcome to Boehm. But dragging me to jail and into court to become a public show is something else." He slowly and pensively extracted a cigarette from the case. "Do you really think you can do that, Captain?"

"Damn right," Fields snapped. "Get your hat and coat, and be quick unless you want to go just like you are."

SHELBY shook his head and lifted the cigarette towards his lips. Suddenly Tommy Carter leaped forward, flung himself across the table and snatched the cigarette from Shelby's fingers. He regained his balance and stood with the cigarette in his fist.

Shelby's face was black with rage. His eyes blazed at the reporter.

"What the hell," Fields barked.

"There was only one cigarette in that case," Tommy said. There was an open box right there on the table. You'd better be careful of this until you have it analyzed." He held out the cigarette.

"Smart—for a cop," Shelby snarled. "There is enough cyanide in that cigarette to kill ten men instantly. But you only delayed the result. My plans never fail—unless some idiot like Boehm bungles."

Fields strode around the table, yanked Shelby from the chair and held him firmly by the arms. "Tanner," he panted, "frisk this monkey. Clean."

Tanner obeyed. He laid everything he took from Shelby's pockets on the table. When he had finished he looked at Fields.

"Now cuff his hands behind him," Fields ordered, "and hang on to him."

Among the articles Tanner had put on the table was a small leather sheath containing two keys. Fields inspected them. "One looks like a deposit box key," he said.

"The other," Tommy Carter said, "is for a lock box at the main post-office. The *Banner* has one. I've used it."

"A reporter," Shelby snarled. "I thought you were too smart for a cop. That box is where Boehm's gun

would have been until I disposed of it if he had—"

"That's where we'll find it, smart guy," Fields barked. "Boehm didn't have it. And he didn't talk—but you have. Tanner, take him down. Strip him and give him dungarees. Put him in the padded cell and have him watched. This big shot is going to burn."

Tanner and Dickson left with their prisoner. Fields drew a long breath and looked at Tommy Carter. "Well, it worked," he said. "But I'm a much older man. Come on. We'll use these keys."

"You use them," Tommy said, "but drop me at the *Banner* first. Then telephone me what you find. I'll be writing my story."

Twenty minutes later the *Banner* was in the throes of giving birth to an extra. Tommy Carter's story had gone down in takes. Tommy's phone rang. It was Captain Fields. Tommy listened, put down the phone and crossed to the city desk. His manner betokened fresh news.

"Hold it a minute for a bulletin, Fred," Tommy said. "Monterville Shelby just killed himself in his cell. He took out his upper plate, broke it and got a capsule of cyanide. He swallowed the capsule before the guard could open the cell door."

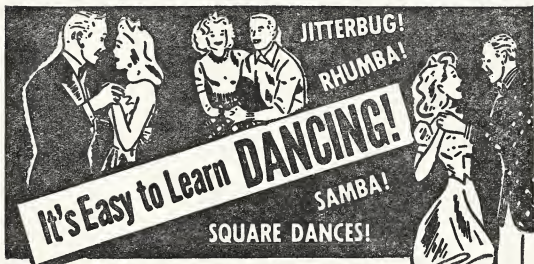
"Bat it out fast," Loring snapped as he reached for the composing room phone.

Tommy stood beside the city editor and scanned the damp copy of the *Banner* extra that had hit the street at the same time as the afternoon finals. "Even scooped the radio," Tommy chortled. "Quite a spot of detecting, I modestly remarked."

"You," Loring snapped, "tear your fanny out to the horse show and do a little reporting—like it says on your pay check."

"I flee," Tommy grinned. "I can't stand all this praise."

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STICK CLOSE TO MURDER

(Continued from page 85)

told him, "you keep on my tail and I'll take you down an alley and whip hell out of you."

"Better not, Pop," he grinned. "You may need me. If I see Raskob, I'll ask him about that broken hand."

"And so will Pop," I told him grimly.

IT WASN'T until I made the Valentine Club, the swankiest joint in town, that I found Raskob. By that time I was touching ceilings myself. I spotted him across the dance floor, sitting in a booth with Fillman. Maria Galvez was doing a hot number and Mike and Fillman were beaming plenty.

You've seen Maria, that Latin from deep Brooklyn? Not too tall and not too wide, but all woman! Sort of a swarthy, yet creamy color, and with a manner of singing that does something to a man. To say nothing of her manner of dancing. South American costume, always, with a low cut waist that gives ideas even to an old guy like me. And the full skirt swings high over her silk knees, and maybe you get just a tantalizing glimpse again of that smooth creamy skin. Aw, hell, you've seen her. Everyone has seen her!

She finished her number to terrific applause. To get to Mike's booth I had to pass the bar. So I bought me an Old Fashioned to change my luck and asked the barman about Brenda Sloan, whether or not she'd been around lately.

He grinned, and said, "Not since her and the boss had their racket. Couple of weeks ago."

I said, "The boss? Fillman?"

"Naw," he sneered, "not that cheap skate. The real boss, Big Mike." So I had another little piece

for my jigsaw. I got on past the bar and was almost to the booth when I heard Maria Galvez' voice raised in anger. So I stopped.

She was saying with just enough of an accent to make it good, "I do not fool, I tale you! I am a jealous wooman! What can she be to you now? I am glad, glad, soomethin happen to her! Now it can be you and Maria, the way we were meant! I take thees thing you carry in your wallet and poof! poof!"

Little bits of something sailed through the air and landed at my feet. I picked them up and went back to the bar. It took a little time but I pieced them together. And I figured then I had my puzzle complete. The picture was one of Brenda Sloan. Combined with what the barman had told me—?

I HAVE a key to Fillman's on account of keeping a lot of paraphernalia there. I got a not-too-clean towel, and a little machine oil. I squirted the oil in a few spots on the towel and folded it careful and stuck it in my pocket. In fifteen minutes, drunken like, I was back in the Valentine Club, saying, "Howya, Mike; howya, Fillman?"

And they began condoling with me about poor Eddie of course. We had a few drinks and finally I said, "Lookit, has any of you guys ever seen that rat with a gun?"

Mike said no, and so did Fillman. And they both wanted to know why.

I took out the towel. I winked big. "Don't ask me how I got this—I got connections, that's all. This here is the towel Rat Eddie Maloney used on that poor kid. But he didn't use no weight in it! He used a gun!"

"How do you know?"

"Because the coroner found a place where the weight wouldn't have fitted, but a gun butt would! Right in her jaw! And then the chemist examined the towel and found gun oil on it! Smell! Gun oil! You know what that means? It means that when we find the gun, it's bound to have a little flesh and skin embedded in the butt!"

Fillman said, "I never saw Eddie with a rod." He got up and slapped me on the back. "Well, if you guys will excuse me a minute." Then he was gone. I wanted him out of there, didn't want him interfering for a few minutes. I folded the towel and put it in my pocket.

Then I leaned across the table and said, "Let's quit fooling, Mike. It all fits in too nice. You know Eddie didn't kill her."

"Who killed her, Pop?"

"You or Fillman. It would have been easy to get in the hotel, and take that private elevator up to her penthouse. You wanted her out of the way, didn't you? She was shaking you down plenty, and you was hot for this Galvez babe."

"You're drunk, Pop. I can alibi all my time; so can Fillman. You shouldn't talk like that."

"Fillman told you how I wouldn't sign Eddie to anything without his consent. You sent for me, Mike, with a big show of secrecy, so that I wouldn't be in the gym when the wire came."

"Pop, I told you not to talk like that. The wire to Eddie came from Penthouse D! Now take a drink and run along."

"Brenda probably wired him at your suggestion, thinking she'd regain your favor for doing it. Why, Mike, you even tried to sign Eddie with the first name that came to your mind—a boy you own yourself, a boy you'd like to nurse into a championship. And all the time Kid Montez with a busted hand! Why don't you come clean?"

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LOIS L. REEDER, Box 348-U, Palestine, Texas

"You still talk too much," said Mike. "You couldn't make anything like that stick on me and you know it. And why would I—?"

"To kill a pair of birds at once, Mike. To get rid of a blackmailing, chiseling woman, and to get rid of Eddie, because he stood in the way of your own fighter. Right here I got pieces of Brenda's picture from your wallet, where the Galvez woman made you tear them up!"

Somebody slid in beside me and something was stuck into my ribs. This I hadn't counted on. I hadn't figured there'd be any gunplay in a joint like this! The guy was little Joe Wales, who was always doing bodyguarding for Fillman! Mike nodded. He said, "We'll have to take him into the office, Joe. He knows too much and he's got a little bit of stuff that might prove embarrassing to me—and to you."

Wales snarled, "You said you could cover me up on this, Mike. Hell, I never even saw that damned chest weight, I figured I was getting a break. Now we got to get out of here so I can ditch this rod—after I use it on this monkey. And you're going along! So's Fillman! You're going to be in this as deep as I am!"

"Sure, sure, of course, Joe. Back out of the booth with the rod in your pocket. And you, Pop, you move easy. We'll collect Fillman and go out the back way."

Joe Wales went out of the booth. I got up, easy. Mike arose. We stepped out onto the floor. And Harrington, the copper, got up out of the next booth and said, "Hello, boys, going some place? I'm just leaving, myself."

JOE WALES lost his head. Or maybe he didn't. Maybe he knew what I said was true about a gun, whether it was a lucky stab in the dark on my part or not—that bits of flesh and

skin were bound to be found in the butt! Anyway he whirled. I believe he'd have beaten Harrington to it, except I slugged him. And Harrington shot him through the shoulder. Mike Raskob just collapsed like a big bag of putty. And Wise already had Fillman up by the front door, trying to take a powder. Afterward, when they all tried to out-sing the other, convictions were easy.

There was only one thing that bothered me. I asked Harrington how come he kept on my trail all evening. He laughed. He said, "Well, Pop, I've seen you around a good many years. I've seen you second champs and bums alike in the ring, and I never saw you get disgusted and lay down on your man. So when you left the jail this evening and I saw the set of your jaw, I had a hunch. I told myself a good second stuck to his man until the bitter end—and I knew that was what you intended doing by Eddie Maloney—sticking. A good second never quits, Pop, and that's you all over."

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SAVINGS BONDS

ON THE BLOTTER

(Continued from page 6)

isn't necessary for them to wait until a city commission passes bills authorizing the expenditure of money for the purchase of armored cars, radio, machine guns and other things which an up-to-date police department must have.

When you send your policeman, carrying a rifle or pistol, against thugs and bandits armed with machine guns and grenades, you are committing murder as surely as if you pulled the trigger yourself.

Taken as a body of men, coppers are not cowards. Your own daily newspaper frequently tells of officers, caught in a jam, and without help, going up against hopeless odds. The result is usually the death of the officer. Foolish, the reader says. But what would he say if the officer had calmly suffered the indignity of having his gun taken away? Yellow!

The natural reaction of the average citizen is, "Well, what can I do about it?" And the answer is—"Plenty!"

The responsible business man, the one who has the most to lose or gain, should drop in on his chief of police or commissioner. Talk over his problems. Ask him what he needs and if he is getting the proper cooperation from the city council. If not, get the local associations behind the law-makers. Organizations such as the service and luncheon clubs can do more to influence a city commission than any other single body can do.

REMEMBER, many cities are ruled by an organized minority. By pulling together they accomplish things that leave the honest and responsible citizen gasping in exasperation. Why? Because they are orga-

nized to apply pressure at the proper place and time.

By the same means, citizens wishing to clean up their city can do so. The average man is apt to think, "Well, mine is only one vote, so what difference does it make?" Ask any alderman what difference it makes to him. He is eager for that vote, and if he sees that business and professional men and women are organized, and ready to vote in a body, watch the policies swing!

I repeat, drop in on your police chief or commissioner. See what the department needs. Talk to your friends and let it be known that the real citizens, the producing, valuable members of society are about to do a little organizing on their own part.

It is quite possible that the city will get those two armored bandit chasers, that new brace of machine guns and bullet-proof vests, that much needed radio equipment—and get it before the street in front of Alderman Gizenhoop's house is repaved for the 'steenth time this year. And, lastly, see that you pay your bodyguards a living wage, Arnold, so they won't have to depend on five-dollar bribes.

Forget you wrote the letter you did, Arnold, and get acquainted with your cops. They're not bad fellows. I worked with them possibly for more years than I have hairs on my head—and I know. Visit them at their homes and would you be surprised. Do you know they will show you pictures of the missus and the little ones, just like you and me!

... ON THE BLOTTER ...

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BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is both contagious and infectious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

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